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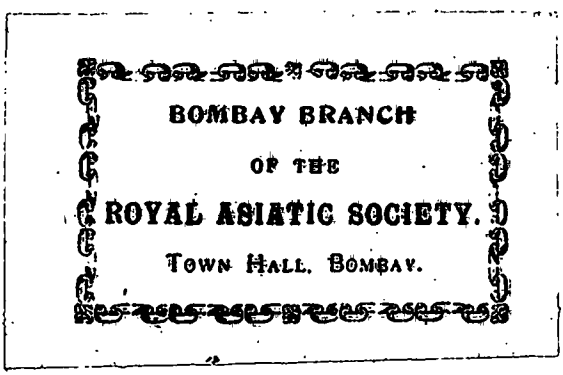


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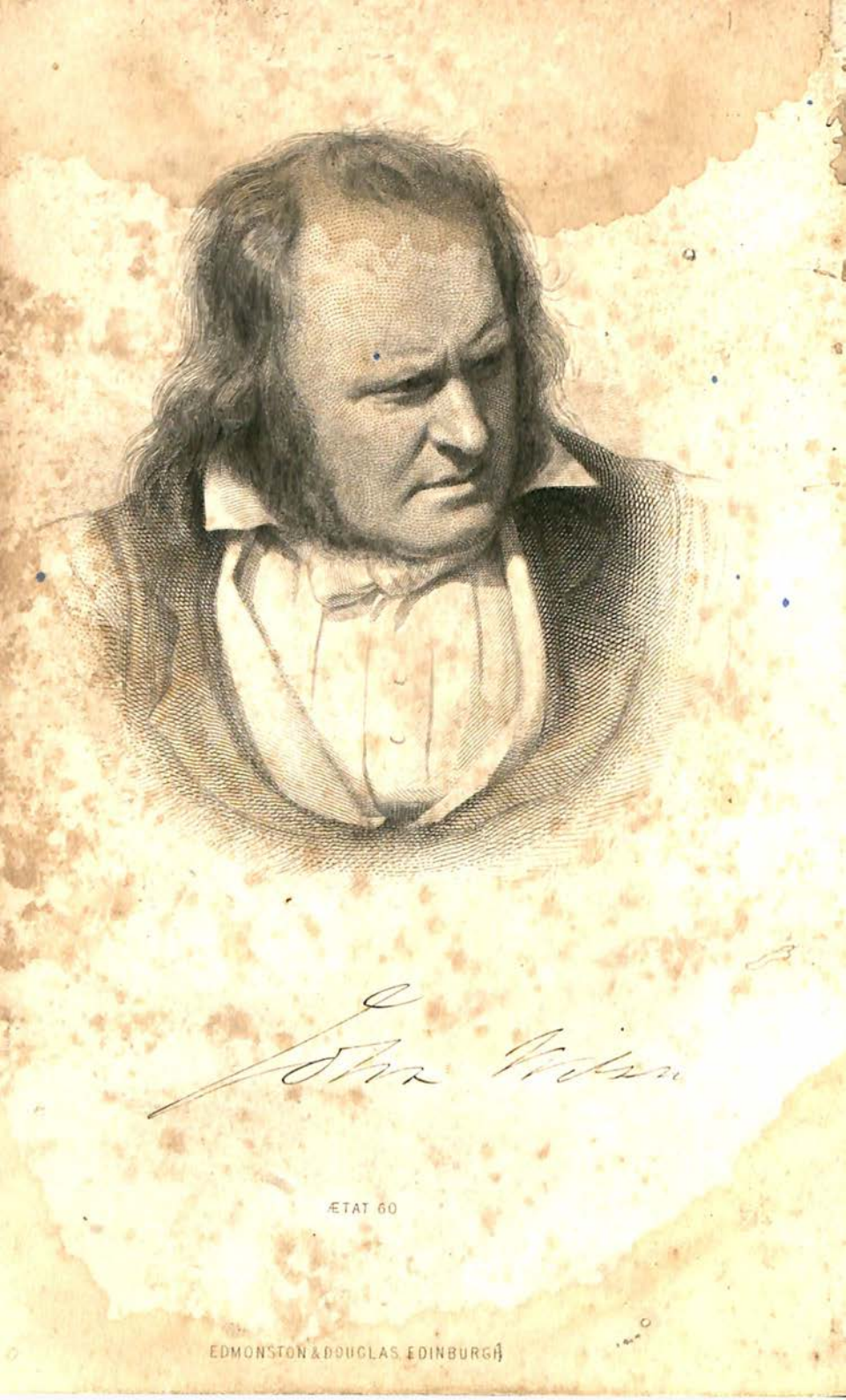

John Wilson

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EDMONSTON & DOUGLAS, EDINBURGH

# 'CHRISTOPHER NORTH'

## A MEMOIR OF JOHN WILSON

LATE PROFESSOR OF MORAL PHILOSOPHY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

COMPILED

FROM FAMILY PAPERS AND OTHER SOURCES

BY HIS DAUGHTER

MRS. GORDON

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VOL. I.

EDINBURGH

EDMONSTON AND DOUGLAS

1862.

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# PREFACE.

I HAVE with much misgiving taken upon myself the duty of writing a Memoir of PROFESSOR WILSON, believing that my father's life was worthy of being recorded, and that it would bear to be truthfully told. I was well aware of the great difficulties attending its performance, and they proved not less than I anticipated; and I knew that I rendered myself liable to the charge of presumption in undertaking a task declined by abler hands. But I could not give up my persuasion that an imperfect picture of such a man was better than none at all, and in that conviction I have done what I could.

The many-sided character of the man I have not attempted to unfold; nor have I presumed to give a critical estimate of his works,—they must speak for themselves. Now and then, in the course of the narrative, where letters are introduced referring to literary subjects, I have made a few observations on his writings; but in no other way, with the exception of those

chapters devoted to *Blackwood's Magazine* and the Moral Philosophy chair, have I departed from my original intention of giving a simple domestic memoir. If I have in any way done justice to my father's memory in this respect, I am rewarded.

I have availed myself of the letters of my father's principal correspondents, so far as they served to throw light on the main subject, or were in themselves interesting and characteristic. I trust, in doing so, that I have inserted nothing calculated to displease or give pain to any now living. If I have erred in this or other respects, my inexperience in literary work must be my excuse.

I have spoken of the difficulties that I had to encounter. It is now my pleasing duty to thank the friends who have so kindly lent me their assistance, without which I should indeed have been much at a loss.

To my brothers, Mr. John Wilson of Billholm, Mr. Blair Wilson, and my brother-in-law, Professor Aytoun, I am indebted for memoranda and many domestic letters.

Others too numerous to mention by name, will, I hope, accept my thanks for their courteous kindness in rendering me such service as lay in their power.

To the various students of former days, who have so heartily contributed their reminiscences of the "old man eloquent" whom they loved, I offer my most grateful thanks. Those parts of the work which are chiefly made up of such contributions, will, I am sure, be regarded by many as among its most valuable and interesting contents. To Mr. Hill Burton, the Rev. William Smith, and Mr. A. T. Innes, I am under very special obligations in this respect.

To Messrs. Blackwood I am indebted for a complete list of my father's contributions to the *Magazine* from 1826, which has enabled me to make use of autobiographic details otherwise inaccessible.

To Mr. Macduff of Bonhard, and Mr. John Boyd, Publisher, I am obliged for their kindness in placing at my disposal the correspondence connected with the publication respectively of the *Isle of Palms* and of *Janus*.

Sir David Brewster and Sheriff Cay have conferred a most valuable favour upon me in permitting the use of Mr. Lockhart's portfolios.

To my friend, Mr. Alexander Nicolson, Advocate, I am especially indebted: his warm encouragement aided my labours, and his judicious advice guided me in the arrangement of my materials, which, both in MS. and in

type, he also carefully revised. The trouble which he has kindly taken in connexion with this work is such as could have been expected only from one of those whom Professor Wilson loved to call his "children."

In conclusion, I may express my humble hope that these volumes, however they may come short of expectation, will prove acceptable to my friends and that portion of the public who love and respect the name of JOHN WILSON.

EDINBURGH, *October* 1862.

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[1] This cut was originally inserted in Mr. James Wilson's *Voyage round Scotland*. I am indebted for the use of it to the kindness of Messrs. A. and C. Black.

# MEMOIR OF JOHN WILSON.

## CHAPTER I.

### BOYHOOD.

THE epithets "pretty" and "pleasant," more than once applied in the writings of Professor Wilson to the place of his birth, are not those which the passing traveller would now think most appropriate to the town of Paisley, where the smoke and steam of countless factories incessantly roll over the inky waters of once fair-flowing Cart. And yet it was not the mere partiality of filial affection that made it seem both pretty and pleasant to his eyes, for such it truly was in the days when he first knew it. And has it not still its pleasant walks and pretty gardens, and its grand old Abbey? Do not green Gleniffer and Stanley Shaw still flourish near enough to be enjoyed? Is it not pleasant still to look beyond fields and trees to the sacred spot called Elderslie? And though gauze and cotton be even more than ever the chief concern of Paisley, has it not still its poets and musicians and men of taste, to

make it a "pleasant" habitation, in spite of smoke and steam and sluggish waters? No native of that respectable old town need be ashamed of his birthplace, and justly is it proud of him who stands foremost among all its sons.

A somewhat gloomy-looking house in a dingy court at the head of the *High* Street, now used as a lecture-hall for the artisans of Paisley, is preserved as classic ground, under the name of "Wilson's Hall." In that house the poet was born, on the 18th of May 1785. At no great distance stands the family residence, to which, after the birth of John, their first son but fourth child, Mr. and Mrs. Wilson removed. It is a stately building, with large gardens, and an imposing entrance. The windows to the back command an extensive view of a beautiful undulating country, with the nearer prospect of a woody vale and rich sloping fields, a landscape sufficiently attractive to have awakened the love of nature in a child's heart, and to have held dominion there in after days, when memory recalled the home of youth, and those delightful pictures of boyhood's life which were immortalized in the "Recreations of Christopher North." Of Mr. Wilson, senior, I know little more than that he was a wealthy man, having realized his fortune in trade as a gauze manufacturer. The integrity of his character and his mercantile successes gave him an important position in society, and he is still remembered in Paisley as having been in his own day one of the richest and most respected of its community; while his house possessed a great attraction in his admirable and beautiful wife, a lady of rare in-

tellect, wit, humour, wisdom, and grace. Her maiden name was Margaret Sym. Her brother Robert is not unknown to fame as the "Timothy Tickler" of the *Noctes Ambrosianæ*. Her mother, of the Dunlops of Garnkirk, was lineally descended, by the female side, from the great Marquis of Montrose. Whether this gentle blood had anything to do with the physical characteristics of the family or not, certain it is that Mrs. Wilson, her sons and daughters, were remarkably distinguished by personal beauty of a refined and dignified type. An aspect so stately as that of the old lady is not often to be seen. Nor was she less gifted with qualities more durable than beauty; for ere long she was called upon, by the death of her husband, to exercise the wisdom and strength of her character in rearing a large family of sons and daughters. How well she performed that duty was best seen in the reverence and love of her children, all of whom, save two sons and a daughter, lived to shed tears over her grave, and to give proof in their own lives of that admirable training which had taught them betimes the way that they should go.[1]

[1] It will not be out of place here to give the names of the ten children born to Mr. Wilson and his wife:—

1. Grace Wilson, married George Cashel, Esquire, Ireland; died, 1835. 2. Jane Wilson, died unmarried, 1835. 3. Margaret Wilson, married John Ferrier, Esquire, W.S., Edinburgh; died, 1833. 4. John Wilson, married Miss Jane Penny; died, 1854. 5. Andrew Wilson, married Miss Aitken, Glasgow; died, 1812. 6. Henrietta Wilson, died young. 7. William Wilson, died in infancy. 8. Robert Sym Wilson, married Miss Eliza Penny. 9. Elizabeth Wilson, married Sir John M'Neill, G.C.B. 10. James Wilson, married Miss Isabella Keith, Edinburgh; died, 1856.

In his childish years John Wilson was as beautiful and animated a creature as ever played in the sunshine. That passion for sports, and especially angling, in which his strong nature found such characteristic vent in after years, was developed at an age when most little boys are still hardly safe beyond the nurse's apron-strings. He was but three years old when he rambled off one day armed with a willow-wand, duly furnished with a thread line, and crooked pin, to fish in a "wee burnie," of which he had taken note, away a good mile from home. Unknown to any one, already appreciating the fascination of an undisturbed and solitary "cast," the blue-eyed and golden-haired adventurer sallied forth to the water-side to spend a day of unforgotten delight, lashing away at the rippling stream, with what success we may perhaps find recorded in Fytte First of "Christopher in his Sporting Jacket:"—

"A tug—a tug! With face ten times flushed and pale by turns ere you could count ten, he at last has strength, in the agitation of his fear and joy, to pull away at the monster; and there he lies in his beauty among the gowans and the greensward, for he has whapped him right over his head and far away, a fish a quarter of an ounce in weight, and, at the very least, two inches long! Off he flies, on wings of wind, to his father, mother, and sisters, and brothers and cousins, and all the neighbourhood, holding the fish aloft in both hands, still fearful of its escape, and like a genuine child of corruption, his eyes brighten at the first blush of cold blood on his small fumy fingers. He carries about with him, upstairs and down-stairs, his prey upon a plate; he will

not wash his hands before dinner, for he exults in the silver scales adhering to the thumb-nail that scooped the pin out of the baggy's maw; and at night, 'cabined, cribbed, confined,' he is overheard murmuring in his sleep—a thief, a robber, and a murderer, in his yet infant dreams!"

While the future Christopher was thus early asserting himself out of doors, the "Professor" also was displaying his capacity in the nursery. There his activity and animation kept the little circle alive from morning to night. With his sisters he was a great favourite; they looked up to his superior intelligence, and wondered at all he did. Of in-door amusements the most exciting to their youthful minds and his precocious genius was that of pulpit oratory. One sermon he used himself to speak of as being a *chef-d'œuvre*. So much was it appreciated, that he was continually called on to repeat it. Standing upon a chair, arranged to look as like a pulpit as possible, he would address his juvenile congregation, along with the more mature audience of nurses and other servants assembled to listen to his warning voice. The text chosen was one from his own fertile brain, drawn from that field of experience in which he was already becoming an adept, and handled not without shrewd application to moral duties. These were the words: "There was a fish, and it was a deil o' a fish, and it was ill to its young anes." In this allegory of life he displayed both pathos and humour, drawing a contrast between good and evil parents, that excited sympathy and laughter, while the sermon was delivered with a vehemence of natural eloquence that in a boy of

five years old may well have entitled him to be looked upon as a genius.

One other anecdote may here be given, which he used to tell with much humour. As a child, he was very fond of drawing, an accomplishment he regretted in after life having laid aside, before he had acquired sufficient skill to enable him to sketch from nature. One day he had copied a tiger, and, no doubt, having given to the animal considerable characteristic vigour, his mother—with natural mother's pride—treasured the specimen highly. He was not aware of the sensation this juvenile success in art had created, till one morning a visitor was announced when he was present, and was scarcely seated, ere to his surprise she was accosted by Mrs. Wilson with the words, pronounced in broad Scotch, as was the manner in those days with many well-educated people, "Have ye seen oure John's teegar?" when forthwith the "teegar" was exhibited to the admiring eyes of her guest. It was not long before "oure John's teegar" was well known in Paisley.[1]

The time had now come when the training of the nursery was to be followed by regular education at school, and John was committed to the tuition of Mr. James Peddie, English teacher, Paisley. To a child who loved to learn, the drudgery of a first apprenticeship at school would never be irksome. A year or two with

[1] In Flight First of "The Moors," I find an allusion to this work of art. "Strange that, with all our love of nature and of art, we never were a painter. True that in boyhood we were no contemptible hand at a lion or a tiger—and sketches by us of such cats springing or preparing to spring in keelivine, dashed off some fifty or sixty years ago, might well make Edwin Landseer stare."

Mr. Peddie prepared him to enter upon more arduous studies; he left the teacher of his childhood with regret.

The kindness and partiality with which he loved to speak of his friends in Paisley, may be seen in the words he made use of, in reference to this old friend, as he was taking leave of duties he had followed for upwards of half a century. They are honourable alike to master and pupil:—

"It was his method rather to persuade than enforce, and they all saw, even amidst the thoughtlessness of boyhood, that their teacher was a good man; and therefore it was their delight and pride to please him. Sometimes a cloud would overshadow his brow, but it was succeeded by a smile of pleasure as gracious and benign as the summer sky. In his seminary children of all ranks sat on the same form. In that school there was no distinction, except what was created by superior merit and industry, by the love of truth and by ability. The son of the poor man was there on the same form with the sons of the rich, and nothing could ever drive him from his rightful *status* but misconduct or disobedience. No person would deny that the office of a teacher of youth was one of the most important in this world's affairs. A surly or ignorant master might scathe those blossoms, which a man of sense and reflection, by his fostering care, would rear up till they became bright consummate flowers of knowledge and virtue."

The Manse of the neighbouring parish of Mearns was the next place fixed upon by Mr. Wilson to continue the education of his son; and there he found a

*dolce pedagogo* fitted in every way to carry on the instruction in knowledge and virtue, so well begun under the good Mr. Peddie. The Rev. George M'Latchie won no less a share of his pupil's veneration; "the minister in whose house he passed many of his sweetest youthful days, and who regarded him with a paternal, as he always looked up to *him* with a filial regard." That warm heart was ever ready with its tribute of affection to the memory of good men; and amid the tender recollections of the past, hallowed by sentiments of gratitude, no place is more touchingly alluded to than "the dear parish of Mearns." Whoever wishes to find a perfect description of its physical features, as well as most exquisite pictures of the youthful pleasures on which memory cast back a glory, must turn to the pages of the *Recreations*, particularly to the papers entitled "Our Parish," "Christopher in his Sporting Jacket," and "May-Day." From the latter I cannot resist the quotation of the opening paragraph, perhaps the most beautiful of his many apostrophes to that beloved region:—

"Art thou beautiful, as of old, O wild, moorland, sylvan, and pastoral Parish! the Paradise in which our spirit dwelt beneath the glorious dawning of life—can it be, beloved world of boyhood, that thou art indeed beautiful as of old? Though round and round thy boundaries in half an hour could fly the flapping dove—though the martins, wheeling to and fro that ivied and wall-flowered ruin of a Castle, central in its own domain, seem in their more distant flight to glance their crescent wings over a vale rejoicing apart in an-

other kirk-spire, yet how rich in streams, and rivulets, and rills, each with its own peculiar murmur—art thou with thy bold bleak exposure, sloping upwards in ever lustrous undulations to the portals of the East! How endless the interchange of woods and meadows, glens, dells, and broomy nooks, without number, among thy banks and braes! And then of human dwellings—how rises the smoke, ever and anon, into the sky, all neighbouring on each other, so that the cock-crow is heard from homestead to homestead; while as you wander onwards, each roof still rises unexpectedly—and as solitary, as if it had been far remote. Fairest of Scotland's thousand parishes—neither Highland, nor Lowland—but undulating—let us again use the descriptive word—like the sea in sunset after a day of storms—yes, Heaven's blessing be upon thee! Thou art indeed beautiful as of old!"

Of the precocity of this boy there is evidence enough; but, unlike most precocious children, he was foremost in the play-ground as well as at the task. With him both work and play were equally enjoyed, and he threw his whole energy into the one or other in its turn. In school he was every inch the scholar; but when the books were laid aside, and the fresh air played on his bright cheeks, he was king of all sports, the foremost and the maddest in every jocund enterprise. A pleasant idea of the relation in which the kind minister of the Mearns stood to his pupils, is given in a note from Sir John Maxwell of Pollok, who was a schoolfellow of my father:—

"He was above me in the ranks of the school, in

stature, and mental acquirements. I may mention as an illustration of the energy, activity, and vivacity of his character, that one morning, I having been permitted to go and fish in the burn near the kirk, and having caught a fine trout, was so pleased, that I repaired to the minister's study to exhibit my prize to Dr. M'Latchie, who was then reading Greek with him. He, seeing my trout, started up and addressing his reverend teacher said, 'I *must* go now to fish.' Leave was granted, and I willingly resigned to him my rod and line; and before dinner he re-appeared with a large dish of fish, on which he and his companions feasted, not without that admiration of his achievement which youth delights to express and always feels."

This simple relation, to those who knew the man in after life, and have heard him speak of the happy hours which gave, in his eyes, so great a charm to "Our Parish," suggests one of those bright days he loved to wander to in memory, long after the sunny visions of youth had glided into the silent past. "Such days," says he, "seem now to us—as memory and imagination half restore and half create the past into such weather as may have shone over the bridal morn of our first parents in Paradise—to have been frequent—nay, to have lasted all the summer long—when our boyhood was bright from the hands of God. Each of those days was in itself a life!"[1]

It is impossible to overrate the influence of such a training as young Wilson had during these happy years, in forming that singular character, in virtue of

[1] "Soliloquy on the Seasons," *Works*, vol. x. p. 231.

which he stands out as unique and inimitable among British men of genius, as Jean Paul, *Der Einzige*, among his countrymen. In no other writings do we find so inexhaustible and vivid a reminiscence of the feelings of boyhood. There was in that heart of his a perpetual well-spring of youthful emotion. In contact with him we are made to feel as if this man were, in himself the type, never to grow old, of all the glorious bright-eyed youths that we have known in the world; capable of entering with perfect luxury of abandonment into their wildest frolics, but also of transfiguring their pastimes into mirrors of things more sublime, of rising without strain or artifice, from the level of common and material objects, into the serene heights of poetic, philosophic, and religious contemplation. Not in vain was this brilliant youth, with his capacity for every form of activity, bodily and mental, his passionate love of nature, and his deep reverence for all things high and pure, placed in the spring-time of his days amid the manifold wholesome influences of a Scottish manse and school in the "wild, moorland, sylvan, pastoral parish" of Mearns. For truly has he himself remarked of the importance of this period of life—"Some men, it is sarcastically said, are boys all life long, and carry with them their puerility to the grave. 'Twould be well for the world were there in it more such men. By way of proving their manhood, we have heard grown-up people abuse their own boyhood, forgetting what our great philosophical poet—after Milton and Dryden—has told them, that

'The boy is father of the man,

and thus libelling the author of their existence. . . . . Not only are the foundations dug and laid in boyhood, of all the knowledge and the feelings of our prime, but the ground-flat too built, and often the entire second storey of the superstructure, from the windows of which, the soul looking out, beholds nature in her state, and leaps down, unafraid of a fall on the green or white bosom of earth, to join with hymns the front of the procession. The soul afterwards perfects her palace—building up tier after tier of all imaginable orders of architecture — till the shadowy roof, gleaming with golden cupolas, like the cloud-region of the setting sun, set the heavens ablaze."[1]

It were a vain task to attempt, in any words but his own, to recall some of those boyish experiences, which made that life in the Mearns so rich a seed-field of bright memories and imaginations. I must, therefore, draw upon the pages of the *Recreations* for a few pictures of "Young Kit," as he appeared to himself looked at through the vista of half a life. After describing how his youthful passion for the observation of nature impelled him, when a mere child, to wander away among the moors and woods, he goes on :—

"Once it was feared that poor wee Kit was lost; for having set off all by himself, at sunrise, to draw a night-line from the distant Black Loch, and look at a trap set for a glede, a mist overtook him on the moor on his homeward way, with an eel as long as himself hanging over his shoulder, and held him prisoner for many hours within its shifting walls, frail indeed, and op-

[1] Wilson's *Works*, vol. x. p. 283.

posing no resistance to the hand, yet impenetrable to the feet of fear as the stone dungeon's thraldom. If the mist had remained, that would have been nothing; only a still cold wet seat on a stone; but as 'a trot becomes a gallop soon, in spite of curb and rein,' so a Scotch mist becomes a shower—and a shower a flood—and a flood a storm—and a storm a tempest—and a tempest thunder and lightning—and thunder and lightning heavenquake and earthquake—till the heart of poor wee Kit quaked, and almost died within him in the desert. In this age of Confessions, need we be ashamed to own, in the face of the whole world, that we sat us down and cried! The small brown moorland bird, as dry as a toast, hopped out of his heather-hole, and cheerfully cheeped comfort. With crest just a thought lowered by the rain, the green-backed, white-breasted peaseweep, walked close by us in the mist; and sight of wonder, that made even in that quandary by the quagmire our heart beat with joy—lo! never seen before, and seldom since, three wee peaseweeps, not three days old, little bigger than shrew-mice, all covered with blackish down, interspersed with long white hair, running after their mother! But the large hazel eye of the she peaseweep, restless even in the most utter solitude, soon spied us glowering at her, and her young ones, through our tears; and not for a moment doubting (Heaven forgive her for the shrewd but cruel suspicion!) that we were Lord Eglinton's gamekeeper, with a sudden shrill cry that thrilled to the marrow in our cold backbone, flapped and fluttered herself away into the mist, while the little black bits

of down disappeared, like devils, into the moss. The croaking of the frogs grew terrible. And worse and worse, close at hand, seeking his lost cows through the mist, the bellow of the notorious red bull! We began saying our prayers; and just then the sun forced himself out into the open day, and like the sudden opening of the shutters of a room, the whole world was filled with light. The frogs seemed to sink among the powheads; as for the red bull who had tossed the tinker, he was cantering away, with his tail towards us, to a lot of cows on the hill; and hark—a long, a loud, an oft-repeated halloo! Rab Roger, honest fellow, and Leezy Muir, honest lass, from the manse, in search of our dead body! Rab pulls our ears lightly, and Leezy kisses us from the one to the other, wrings the rain out of our long yellow hair (a pretty contrast to the small grey sprig now on the crown of our pericranium, and the thin tail acock behind); and by-and-by stepping into Hazel-Deanhead for a drap and a 'chitterin' piece,' by the time we reach the manse we are as dry as a whistle—take our scold and our pawmies from the minister—and, by way of punishment and penance, after a little hot whisky-toddy with brown sugar and a bit of bun, are bundled off to bed in the daytime!"

Could anything be more deliciously vivid than that picture of little Kit and the maternal peaseweep "glowering" at each other in the midst of the Scotch mist?

Let us see him now a few years older, and some inches taller, armed with that remarkable piece of artillery, "Muckle-mou'd Meg," of which he has him-

self given this most inimitable description, or one only equalled by Hood's glorious schoolboy epistles :—

"There had been from time immemorial, it was understood, in the Manse, a duck-gun of very great length, and a musket that, according to an old tradition, had been out both in the Fifteen and Forty-five. There were ten boys of us, and we succeeded by rotation to gun or musket, each boy retaining possession for a single day only; but then the shooting season continued all the year. They must have been of admirable materials and workmanship; for neither of them so much as once burst during the Seven Years' War. The musket, who, we have often since thought, must surely rather have been a blunderbuss in disguise, was a perfect devil for kicking when she received her discharge; so much so, indeed, that it was reckoned creditable for the smaller boys not to be knocked down by the recoil. She had a very wide mouth—and was thought by us 'an awfu' scatterer;' a qualification which we considered of the very highest merit. She carried anything we chose to put into her—there still being of all her performances a loud and favourable report — balls, buttons, chuckystanes, slugs, or hail. She had but two faults: she had got addicted, probably in early life, to one habit of burning priming, and to another of hanging fire; habits of which it was impossible, for us at least, to break her by the most assiduous hammering of many a new series of flints; but such was the high place she justly occupied in the affection and admiration of us all, that faults like these did not in the least detract from her general character. Our

delight, when she did absolutely and positively—and *bonâ fide* 'go off,' was in proportion to the comparative rarity of that occurrence; and as to hanging fire—why, we used to let her take her own time, contriving to keep her at the level as long as our strength sufficed, eyes shut perhaps, teeth clenched, face girning, and head slightly averted over the right shoulder, till Muckle-mou'd Meg, who, like most other Scottish females, took things leisurely, went off at last with an explosion like the blowing up of a rock."

If we would see him, at a further stage of boyhood, engaged in still more exciting and boisterous sport, we would need to go back into the *mêlée* of the "Snow-ball Bicker of Pedmount,"[1] a quite Homeric episode, to which it is impossible to do justice by an extract. Those who care, in short, to obtain as complete a picture of that boyish life as it is possible now to have, will find it for themselves in the pages of the *Recreations*, few of which are without some tender and graphic reminiscences of his early days. They are not, of course, to be always taken as literal descriptions of things that happened exactly as there painted; for, as he himself acutely observes, giving the *rationale* of such reminiscence:—"You must know that, unless it be accompanied with imagination, memory is cold and lifeless. . . . All minds, even the dullest, remember the days of their youth; but all cannot bring back the indescribable brightness of that blessed season. They who would know what they once were, must not merely recollect, but they must imagine the hills and valleys,

[1] *Works*, vol. x. p. 274, *et seq.*

if any such there were, in which their childhood played. . . . To imagine what he then heard and saw, he must imagine his own nature. He must collect from many vanished hours the power of his untamed heart, and he must, perhaps, transfuse also something of his own maturer mind into these dreams of his former being, thus linking the past with the present by a continuous chain, which, though often invisible, is never broken." That my father, in these pictures of his youth, did transfuse something of his maturer mind into the vision is manifest enough, and therein lies their peculiar charm and beauty. But of the general fidelity of the impression they convey there can be no doubt. As regards in particular that surpassing excellence in all physical sports which might sometimes appear to be the exaggeration of poetic fancy, there is sufficient testimony from contemporaries. Thus a school-fellow of his writes: "There were other boys five or six years his senior; but in all games, in running, in jumping, in hockey, he was the first and fastest; and he could run faster, and walk longer than any of us." Another says: "He excited our admiration by his excellence in fishing;" while, in regard to "mental superiority," he adds, "he was a capital scholar, and further in advance of the generality of the boys at Mearns than he outshone his competitors in after life."

That with all this manysided ability, and the undoubted consciousness of superior power, he was a prime favourite among his fellows, is not difficult to believe, when we find how affectionate and magnanimous was his nature; a nature in which the develop-

ment of soul and body, of intellect and feeling, attained a harmony so rare. The combination of these gifts in such goodly proportion enabled him to enter, with a sympathy destitute of all affectation, into the feelings and pursuits of persons of the most diverse character; and throughout all the exuberance of his literary activity, much as there is in its earlier stages of impetuosity, and sometimes even *sansculottism*, there is nowhere from beginning to end one trace of malignity or envy. Even such was he in those happy boyish days when he "bathed his feet in beauty" by the banks of the Yearn, and nourished "a youth sublime" in the pure and healthful atmosphere of the dear old Manse.

I pass with reluctance from this happy period, to which my father's heart ever turned with a freshness of delight, which years and sorrows seemed only to increase. The chapter may fitly close with his own account of the feelings with which he bade farewell to that beloved parish, never mentioned without benediction and eulogium.

"Then this was to be our last year in the parish—now dear to us as our birthplace; nay, itself our very birthplace—for in it from the darkness of infancy had our soul been born. Once gone and away from the region of cloud and mountain, we felt that most probably never more should we return. For others, who thought they knew us better than we did ourselves, had chalked out a future life for young Christopher North—a life that was sure to lead to honour, and riches, and a splendid name. Therefore we determined with a

strong, resolute, insatiate spirit of passion, to make the most—the best—of the few months that remained to us, of that our wild, free, and romantic existence, as yet untrammelled by those inexorable laws, which, once launched into the world, all alike—young and old—must obey. Our books were flung aside—nor did our old master and minister frown—for he grudged not to the boy he loved the remnant of the dream about to be rolled away like the dawn's rosy clouds. We demanded with our eye—not with our voice—one long holiday, throughout that our last autumn, on to the pale farewell blossoms of the Christmas rose. With our rod we went earlier to the loch or river; but we had not known thoroughly our own soul—for now we angled less passionately, less perseveringly, than was our wont of yore—sitting in a pensive, a melancholy, a miserable dream, by the dashing waterfall or the murmuring wave. With our gun we plunged earlier in the morning into the forest, and we returned later at eve; but less earnest, less eager, were we to hear the cushat's moan from his yew-tree—to see the hawk's shadow on the glade, as he hung aloft on the sky. A thousand dead thoughts came to life again in the gloom of the woods—and we sometimes did wring our hands in an agony of grief, to know that our eyes should not behold the birch-tree brightening there with another spring.

"Then every visit we paid to cottage or to shieling was felt to be a farewell; there was something mournful in the smiles on the sweet faces of the ruddy rustics, with their silken snoods, to whom we used to whisper harmless love-meanings, in which there was no guile;

we regarded the solemn toil-and-care-worn countenances of the old with a profounder emotion than had ever touched our hearts in the hour of our more thoughtless joy; and the whole life of those dwellers among the woods, and the moors, and the mountains, seemed to us far more affecting now that we saw deeper into it, in the light of a melancholy sprung from the conviction that the time was close at hand when we should mingle with it no more. The thoughts that possessed our most secret bosom failed not by the least observant to be discovered in our open eyes. They who had liked us before, now loved us; our faults, our follies, the insolences of our reckless boyhood, were all forgotten; whatever had been our sins, pride towards the poor was never among the number; we had shunned not stooping our head beneath the humblest lintel; our mite had been given to the widow who had lost her own; quarrelsome with the young we might sometimes have been, for boyhood is soon heated, and boils before a defying eye; but in one thing at least we were Spartans —we revered the head of old age.

"And many at last were the kind—some the sad farewells, ere long whispered by us at gloaming among the glens. Let them rest for ever silent amidst that music in the memory which is felt, not heard—its blessing mute though breathing, like an inarticulate prayer!"

## CHAPTER II.

### GLASGOW COLLEGE.

1797-1803.

"LONG, long, long ago, the time when we danced hand in hand with our golden-haired sister! Long, long, long ago, the day on which she died; the hour, so far more dismal than any hour that can now darken us on this earth, when her coffin descended slowly, slowly into the horrid clay, and we were borne, death-like, and wishing to die, out of the churchyard, that from that moment we thought we could never enter more." That touching reminiscence of his golden-haired sister, which came back among the visions of a merry Christmas long after,[1] points to what was probably John Wilson's first deep experience of sorrow; and it is no imaginary picture of the scene it recalled. For even in those early years, and still more as life advanced, he was intensely susceptible to emotions of grief, as well as of gladness. A heavier trial awaited him at the threshold of the new life on which he was to enter after leaving the manse of Mearns in his twelfth year. He had seen the yellow leaves fall, on to the close of that last memorable autumn which finished his happy school-time, and now he was summoned home to see his father die. As he stood

[1] "Christmas Dreams," *Works*, vol. x. p. 286.

at the head of the grave, chief mourner, and heard the dull earth rattling over the coffin, his emotions so overcame him that he fell to the ground in a swoon, and had to be carried away. Such an effect, on a frame more than commonly robust, indicated a depth of feeling and passion not often seen in our clime among boys, or, in its outer manifestations at least, among men. The aspect and the character of Wilson have sometimes suggested to the imagination those blue-eyed and long-haired Norsemen, who made their songs amid the smiting of swords, who were as swift of foot and strong of arm as they were skilled in lore and ready in counsel, fierce to their enemies, tender and true to their friends. And this little incident reminds one more of what we read in Sagas of that passionate vehemence of theirs, than anything we are accustomed to now-a-days.

After the death of his father he appears to have gone immediately to Glasgow University, where he entered as a student in the Latin Class for the session 1797-98, attending other classes in due course down to 1803. During those years he resided in the family of Professor Jardine, the same prudence which had dictated the choice of his earlier instructors, being here again conspicuous, and the results not less satisfactory. His life in Glasgow was a happy one; and under the combined influences of admirable professorial instruction, and a free enjoyment of good society and innocent pleasures, his character developed by natural and insensible transition from boyhood to youth, from the period of school lessons and "Muckle-mou'd Meg" to that of essay-

writing and speech-making, of first love and "lines to Margaret."

Of the various professors under whom he studied, there were two who won his special love and lifelong veneration: these were Jardine and Young.[1] When the relationship between pupil and teacher has been cemented by feelings of respect and affection, the influence obtained over the young mind is one that does not die with the breaking of the ties that formally bound them. Of this Wilson's own experience as a professor afforded him many a delightful illustration. To Jardine, in the first place, as not only his teacher, but his private monitor and friend, he owed, he has himself said, a deep debt of gratitude. He is represented as having been "a person who, by the singular felicity of his *tact* in watching youthful minds, had done more good to a whole host of individuals, and gifted individuals too, than their utmost gratitude could ever adequately repay. They spoke of him as of a kind of intellectual father, to whom they were proud of acknowledging the eternal obligations of their intellectual being. He has created for himself a mighty family among whom his memory will long survive; by whom, all that he said and did—his words of kind praise and kind censure—his gravity and his graciousness—will no doubt be dwelt upon with warm and tender words and looks, long after his earthly labours shall have been brought to a close."[2]

Wilson's intercourse with Professor Young was of a

[1] The former was Professor of Logic, the latter of Greek.

[2] *Blackwood*, July 1818.

nature equally friendly, and his reminiscences of that "old man eloquent" are not less pleasing :—

"We have sat," he says, "at the knees of Professor Young, looking up to his kindling or shaded countenance, while that old man eloquent gave life to every line, till Hector and Andromache seemed to our imagination standing side by side beneath a radiant rainbow glorious on a showery heaven; such, during his inspiration, was the creative power of the majesty and the beauty of their smiles and tears.

"That was long, long ago, in the Greek class of the College of Glasgow; and though that bright scholar's Greek was Scotch Greek, and all its vowels and diphthongs, and some of its consonants too, especially that glorious guttural that sounds in *lochs*, all unlike the English Greek that soon afterwards, beneath the shadow of Magdalen Tower, the fairest of all Oxford's stately structures, was poured mellifluous on our delighted ear from the lips of President Routh, the 'erudite and the wise,' still hath the music of that 'repeated strain' a charm to our souls, reminding us of life's morning march when our spirits were young, and when we could see even as with our bodily eyes, things far away in space or time, and Troy hung visibly before us even as the sun-setting clouds. Therefore, till death, shall we love the Sixth Book of the Iliad; and, if we understand it not, then indeed has our whole life been vainer than the shadow of a dream."[1]

A somewhat similar account of this interesting man from another source, is worthy of insertion here :—

1 "Homer and his Translators," *Works*, vol. viii. pp. 36, 37.

"I own I was quite thunderstruck to find him passing from a transport of sheer verbal ecstasy about the particle ἀρα, into an ecstasy quite as vehement, and a thousand times more noble, about the deep pathetic beauty of one of Homer's conceptions in the expression of which that particle happens to occur. Such was the burst of his enthusiasm, and the enriched mellow swell of his expanding voice, when he began to touch upon this more majestic key, that I dropped for a moment all my notions of the sharp philologer, and gazed on him with a higher delight, as a genuine lover of the soul and spirit which has been clothed in the words of antiquity.

"At the close of one of his fine excursions into this brighter field, the feelings of the man seemed to be rapt up to a pitch I never before beheld exemplified in any orator of the Chair. The tears gushed from his eyes amidst their fervid sparklings, and I was more than delighted when I looked round and found that the fire of the Professor had kindled answering flames in the eyes of not a few of his disciples."[1]

It may be seen from these sketches what manner of men had the moulding of that young taste in its perception of the good and beautiful. Nor could his mind fail to have been ennobled by such training. It was the means of encouraging him to cultivate the literary taste, which, in addition to the more severe routine of his studies, aided to make his memory a storehouse of knowledge, rendering him even as a boy one of the most desirable companions with his seniors.

Of the characteristic mixture of work and play which

[1] *Peter's Letters.*

enabled him to be both an active and distinguished student, and a vivacious racer and dancer, there is fortunately some slight record extant under his own youthful hand, in the pages of a little brown memorandum-book, in which he carefully noted the chief transactions of each day from the 1st of January to the 26th of October 1801. A very interesting and curious relic it is, if only for the light it throws on that beautiful portrait by Raeburn, now in the National Gallery, Edinburgh, which has probably disappointed so many people as a representation of young Christopher North. That slender youth, so tidily dressed in his top-boots and well-fitting coat, with face so placid, and blue eye so mild, looking as if he never could do or say anything *outré* or startling,—can that be a good picture of him we have seen and heard of as the long-maned and mighty, whose eyes were "as the lightnings of fiery flame," and his voice like an organ bass; who laid about him, when the fit was on, like a Titan, breaking small men's bones; who was loose and careless in his apparel, even as in all things he seemed too strong and primitive to heed much the niceties of custom? So people ask and think who knew *not* Professor Wilson, save out of doors or in print, and who imagine that he could never have been otherwise than as they saw him in manhood or age. But true it is, that that gentle-looking cavalier represents the John Wilson in whom the deep fires of passion and the hidden riches of imagination lay still comparatively quiescent and undeveloped. For that youth, though he is a bold horseman and a matchless leaper, as well as a capital scholar and a versifier to

boot, has not yet had his nature stirred by that which will presently make him talk of life as either bliss ineffable, or wretchedness insufferable. The man whom we know in after-life jotting down his lectures on old backs of letters, illegible sometimes to himself, at this time keeps a neat and punctual diary, with its ink rulings for month, and week, and day, and £ *s d*, all done by his own hand; the one page containing, under the heading "Appointments, Bills, Memorandums," notes of each day's events, with the state of the weather at the week's end; the other, its careful double entry of "Received" and "Paid," duly carried over from page to page; and the expenditure in no single instance exceeding the income. It is altogether an illustration of character that might surprise the uninitiated even more than Raeburn's portrait.

As has been said, labour and pleasure seem not unequally to have divided his time. Invitations to dinner, balls, parties, etc., are frequently chronicled. A boy of sixteen might be supposed to be somewhat prematurely introduced to those social amenities. But in his case, the thing does not seem to have been unnatural, or other than beneficial. No doubt, his personal attractions, and a stature above his years, combined with the knowledge of his good prospects in life, made him an object of more attention than would otherwise have been the case. In the heart of this gaiety, too, there are indications of marked attention to the ordinary but too often neglected minor duties of society. He makes frequent visits of politeness; he writes regularly to his mother and sisters; his respect to his grandmother and other rela-

tives is undeviating, for upon the old lady he waits daily. Order and punctuality in fact seem to regulate his minutest affairs,—the more worthy of remark, as in later years these praiseworthy habits were almost entirely laid aside. It will perhaps not be altogether without interest to insert one or two of the entries from this pocket-book, even though monotonous, and to a certain extent unimportant, alluding to names of persons, the mention of which, save to a very few, will scarcely awaken any familiar associations.

The season is begun at home in Edinburgh, where his mother, with the rest of the family, had now taken up her residence. A happy band of brothers and sisters, and other relatives, there met together to welcome in the New-year. So, for a while, the dingy walls of Glasgow College, and its eight o'clock morning lectures, were shut out from thought, and the bright-hearted boy rejoiced with his friends. Before quoting from the Memorandum-book its brief record of those days, which gleams out from the past like light seen from an aperture for the first time, let us hear him in maturer years recalling the memory of such scenes :—

"Merry Christmases they were indeed; one Lady always presiding, with a figure that once had been the stateliest among the stately, but then somewhat bent, without being bowed down, beneath an easy weight of most venerable years. Sweet was her tremulous voice to all her grandchildren's ears. Nor did those solemn eyes, bedimmed into a pathetic beauty, in any degree restrain the glee that sparkled in orbs that had as yet shed not many tears, but tears of joy or pity.

"Whether we were indeed all so witty as we thought ourselves—uncles, aunts, brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces, cousins, and 'the rest,' it might be presumptuous in us, who were considered by ourselves and a few others not the least amusing of the whole set, at this distance of time to decide—especially in the affirmative; but how the roof did ring with sally, pun, retort, and repartee! Ay, with pun—a species of impertinence for which we have therefore a kindness even to this day. Had incomparable Thomas Hood had the good fortune to have been born a cousin of ours, how with that fine fancy of his would he have shone at those Christmas festivals, eclipsing us all! Our family, through all its different branches, has ever been famous for bad voices, but good ears; and we think we hear ourselves—all those uncles and aunts, nephews and nieces, and cousins —singing now! Easy is it to 'warble melody' as to breathe air. But we hope harmony is the most difficult of all things to people in general, for to us it was impossible; and what attempts ours used to be at seconds! Yet the most woful failures were rapturously encored; and ere the night was done we spoke with most extraordinary voices indeed, every one hoarser than another, till at last, walking home with a fair cousin, there was nothing left for it but a tender glance of the eye—a tender pressure of the hand—for cousins are not altogether sisters, and although partaking of that dearest character, possess, it may be, some peculiar and appropriate charms of their own; as didst thou, Emily the 'Wild-cap!'"

"1*st of January* 1801.—Union with Ireland cele-

brated; Castle guns fired; no illumination. Called on Mr. Sym [Timothy Tickler of a later date].

"*2d of January.*—Ball at our house; danced with the Misses M'Donald, Corbett, Fairfax, Chartres, Balfour, Brown, Lundie, Millar, Young."

Not too long is he to be absent from work. On the 4th of January the gaieties of home are left, and he takes a seat in the "Telegraph."

"Left Edinburgh at seven in the morning; arrived in Glasgow *safe*, and dined with my grandmother."

Items of travelling expenses make a curious comparison between the past and present cost for a similar journey:—

"For a seat in the 'Telegraph,' £1, 1s.

"For the driver and guard of 'Telegraph,' 4s.

"For breakfast and waiter, 1s. 6d."

With his grandmother he was a great favourite. This lady, Mrs. Sym, lived to a good old age, as did also her husband; he being above ninety when he died. The old gentleman had considerable character, and not a little caustic humour; a quality that may be said to have pervaded the Sym family. A story is told of his having sent a note to his wine-merchant on receipt of a jar of rum, which he fancied had had more than the ordinary dilution, begging him to be so obliging, on his next order, as to send the water in one jar and the rum in another. His wife was a gentle, kind woman, and very attractive to young people, to whom she was ever ready to show attention and hospitality. She was very handsome in her youth, "stateliest amongst the stately," as Wilson has called her. In one of her daughter's letters,

written five-and-thirty years later, there is a reminiscence of these early days :—

"Occasionally you and some other boys getting a Saturday's dinner, a good *four-hours*, and being dismissed with—'Now, you will all go away; you have gotten all your dues; and, besides, *I'm weary of you!* Then, as you advanced in your academic career, came Jamie Smith, *Wee* Willy Cumin', Alick Blair, sounding out '*Ohon a ree! ohon a ree!*' Your grandmother ready dressed at her wheel in the parlour, your aunts at their work, Blair announced in the dining-room, and *me* the only one who would join him. On entering, I find him groping in the press and *howking* out a book, part of which was read with his peculiar *burr*."[1]

Many a charmed spot is mentioned in this diary. The name of Hallside, Professor Jardine's residence, is specially associated with reminiscences of pleasant society and light-hearted diversions, which show how well philosophy and geniality agreed together under that hospitable roof. The following is a specimen : —

"23*d March*.—Ran for a wager three times round the garden; accomplished it in nine minutes and a quarter. Won 5s."

Hallside is a modern house, somewhat in the style

[1] The writer of this letter, Miss Catharine Sym, long known in Glasgow as one of its most original characters, was the only unmarried daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Sym. She was perhaps one of the wittiest women of her time, in that dry way so peculiar to Scottish nature. Before she died, not many years ago, at eighty years of age, she returned to her nephew a correspondence, and many juvenile manuscripts that had passed between them in the days of his boyhood. Not long before his death he destroyed those papers, which, had they been extant, might have supplied some interesting materials for this part of the Memoir.

of a Scottish manse. The grounds were about seventy acres in extent, gradually sloping to the east, and bounded in part by the river Calder. On the opposite banks stood the pretty cottage *ornée* of Mrs. Jardine's brother, Mr. Lyndsay, whose wife was the niece of the celebrated Dr. Reid, the metaphysician. Their only child was a beautiful girl, whom Professor Wilson took in after years as model for the heroine of his *Trials of Margaret Lyndsay*. The charms of this agreeable neighbourhood were heightened by the beauty of the situation. Calder Bank, Mr. Lyndsay's residence, commanded a fine view of Bothwell woods and castle, the grey towers of which contrasted well with the dark, spreading trees that faced the ruins of Blantyre Priory, beautifying the banks of the Clyde.

Often did John Wilson and his companions from college visit those enticing scenes, and pleasant it is to find, after a lapse of sixty-one years, a memory fresh and distinct of these happy days. The "Margaret Lyndsay" of that time, now Mrs. Palmes, says:—"My knowledge of your talented father was almost confined to the period of childhood; but I well remember my own delight when the fair-haired, animated boy was my companion by the Calder, in races on Dychmont Hill, on foot or with our ponies. Whatever he did was done with all his soul, whether in boy's play or in those studies appointed him by my uncle, Professor Jardine. His beaming countenance and eager manner showed his deep interest in all he did.

"I recollect suffering from his purchase of a violin. My room was under his, and during the night and early

morning hours he devoted himself to bringing out the most discordant sounds; for as he would not have a master, the difficulties to be overcome only proved an additional charm. The final result of his musical taste I do not remember. Poetry probably succeeded, for even at that early age he wrote *little* poems (long before the 'Isle of Palms'), some of which I hope were preserved."

From his journal is to be seen he purchased other instruments besides a violin :—

"*February* 9*th*.—Got a flute and music-book to learn.

"10*th*.—Began to learn the flute by myself.

"*March* 11*th*—Patterson came to-day. Like Patterson pretty well; agreed with him for sixteen lessons. Terms, a guinea. Bought and paid a German flute.

"12*th*.—Played a duet with Perkins."

There is no further mention in Diary or elsewhere of this musical taste being carried out, although his playing on the flute at Elleray long years after, is a circumstance which inclines one to believe that he continued some practice on this instrument after leaving College. He was, however, a devoted lover of music, both vocal and instrumental, though always preferring the former. His singing was charming, uncultivated as it was by study; no one could listen to it without admiration or a touched heart. His voice was exquisitely sweet,[1]

[1] "*North*.—Do you like my voice, James? I hope you do."

"*Shepherd*.—I wad ha'e kent it, Mr. North, on the Tower o' Babel, on the day o' the great hubbub. I think Socrates maun ha'e had just sic a voice. Ye canna weel ca't saft, for even in its laigh notes there is a sort o' birr; a sort o' dirl that betokens power. Ye canna ca't hairsh, for angry as ye may be at times, it's aye in tune, frae the fineness o' you ear for music. Ye canna ca't sherp, for it's aye sae nat'ral; and flett it could

which, combined with the pathos he infused into every note, and expressed in each word, made the pleasure of hearing him a thing to be remembered for ever. His manner of singing "Auld Lang Syne" may be described as a tribute of love to the memory of the poet, whose words appeared to inspire him with something beyond vocal melody; his sweet, solemn voice filled the air with sounds that, while they melted away, seemed still to linger on the ear, delighting the sense. Many are there who can remember the effect produced by his rendering of this beautiful song.

There is something very *naïve* in the way some of his memoranda are mixed up, in humorous contrast, the important and trivial side by side. Thus we have in one line—"Gave Archy my buckskins to clean;" and in the next, "Prize for the best specimens of the Socratic mode of reasoning given out in the Logick," followed by "Ordered a pair of corduroy breeches, tailor, Mr. Aitken;" "Began the syllogism to-day in the Logic class," and so on.

"*February* 13*th.*—Called on my grandmother; went to the sale of books; had a boxing match of three rounds with Lloyd—beat him."

"14*th.*—General examination to-day in the Logic class;" "not examined; went to the Mearns;" "went to the sale; went to the society; the hack I had an excellent trotter; beat Fehrzyen with ease; found a sack on the road."

never be, gin you were even gi'en ower by the doctors. It's maist the only voice I ever heard that you can say is at ance persuasive and commanding—you micht fear't, but you maun love't."—*Noctes*, vol. i. page 117.

The result of the sale seems to have been most satisfactory. Two entries of purchases made are such as would give delight to a boy who paid due attention to his expenditure of pocket-money: "Bought Foote's Works at the sale, 2 vols., 1s. 8d.;" "also bought the *Rambler*, which Mr. Jardine was owing me."

The next item betrays a true boyish weakness, in the form of a consuming love for sweetmeats, especially of one particular sort,—thus, "For barley-sugar, 4d.;" and at another time, "For barley-sugar at my old man's, most excellent, 6d." This taste is frequently indulged; the sum seems to increase too, by degrees, and many a shilling was spent at *Baxter's* upon this favourite luxury, for which he retained his liking even in old age. During this winter his studies had been prosecuted with considerable assiduity, as may be gathered from his notes.

"*January* 17*th.*—Agreed to-day with Mr. Jardine to give up the Greek class, as I am too *throng*.

"20*th.*—General examination to-day; went to the Speculative Society; spoke as a stranger.

"21*st.*—Finished my exercise upon Logic.

"23*d.*—Called upon my grandmother; gave up the Greek private, finding I had too much to do this winter.

"*February* 5*th.*—Finished my Socratic mode of dialogue to-day.

"*April* 26*th.*—Got the first prize in the Logic class.

"*May* 1*st.*—Prizes distributed; got three of them."

After this date there is no more allusion made to study at College, but enough has been quoted to show how he was disposed towards it. The rest of the sum-

mer is spent in various ways amusing to boyhood, while it is evident that the more agreeable pleasure of ladies' society was not wanting to interest him. The lasting effect of love on a boy's mind is, with most, a matter of doubt; but where there is depth of character, and sincerity as well as strength of feeling, the results are not always to be judged by common experience. How it fared with him in this respect, will be touched upon in another chapter.

One or two more extracts from the Diary before this year has closed must be given. The first is characteristic of his constant energy and movement. Even a simple walk with a friend finds him wearied with anything like delay: "Walked to Paisley with Andrew Napier; tried him a race; ran three miles on the Paisley road for a wager against a *chaise*, along with Andrew Napier; beat them *both*." Another exploit of a similar nature, at a somewhat later date, is related by a friend who was present on the occasion:[1]—

"He gained a bet by walking *toe and heel* three miles out and back (six miles in all) on the road to Renfrew, from the *shedding* of the roads to Renfrew and Paisley, in two minutes *within* the hour. I accompanied him on foot (but not under the restriction of toe and heel), and Willy Dunlop on horseback, to see that it was fairly won. Nobody could match your father in the college garden at 'hop, step, and jump.' Macleod (now the Rev. Dr. Norman Macleod, sen.), an active Highlander from Morven, who had also the advantage of being his senior, approached most nearly to him."

[1] Mr. Robert Findlay.

It appears that even in holiday-time he set himself to work.

"*June 4th.*—Finished my *poem* on Slavery.

"*7th.*—Began an essay on the Faculty of Imagination.

"*August* 17*th.*—Finished the first volume of Laing's *History of Scotland.*

"*August* 30*th.*—Made considerable progress in my essay upon Imagination; finished the second division of my exercise.

"31*st.*—Stayed at home all day; wrote an account of the Massacre of Glencoe.

"*September* 19*th.*—Stayed at home all day, and wrote an essay upon the Stoical Philosophy."

The notion of John Wilson having been at any time of his life an idle man, must have seemed absurd to those who knew him, though perhaps, for people who think that a hard worker must necessarily be dull and tiresome, natural enough. Even in his boyhood my father was no idler; and there remains still more convincing proof of his assiduity and love of study to be shown in his career when at Oxford. There is yet some short time to be accounted for, spent in Glasgow; and of his friendships formed at College, something may be said in this place. Boys generally combine themselves when at public schools, and other seminaries of education, into select coteries, and are as frequently judged by the qualities of their companions as by their own. The very high character of the Glasgow professors at that time almost insured a certain number of first-class youths, especially as several of them

received into their own houses young men whose education was privately, as well as in their classes, under their superintendence.

Mr. Alexander Blair, to whom my father dedicated an edition of his poems, was an Englishman, and with him he began, at Glasgow, an intercourse that ripened into a lifelong friendship. This gentleman has been deterred from acquiring a prominent position in the world as a philosopher and scholar solely by the modesty and diffidence of his character. He was my father's companion both at Glasgow and at Oxford, and in after life the Professor derived most valuable aid in his philosophical investigations from this friend, whose correspondence with him for many years was uninterrupted. It is much to be regretted that letters of so interesting and elevated a character should, with one or two exceptions, have perished. Another of those early companions was Robert Findlay of Easter Hill, grandson of an accomplished and learned doctor of divinity well known and beloved in Glasgow. He too continued a friend until death; and from him there have come to me many treasured memorials of an affection on both sides like that of brothers. Besides these two, the most intimate associates of John Wilson in those days were Mr. William Horton Lloyd, an Englishman of large fortune (whose beautiful sister married Mr. Leonard Horner), Mr. William Dunlop, and Archibald Hamilton, a distant relative of my father, who afterwards entered the navy, and prematurely closed his promising career in the engagement off Basque Roads.

With these young men poetry was a frequent subject of discussion, and there was one poet, viz., William Wordsworth, on whose merits, then but little recognised, they found themselves unanimous. Some time before he closed his career at Glasgow University, Wilson's attention was attracted by the *Lyrical Ballads*, which had been recently published. There was at that time few eyes that had discerned in them the signs of future greatness. Among the earliest and most enthusiastic, but also most discriminating of their admirers, was young Wilson, who conveyed his sentiments to the poet in a letter of considerable length, written in a spirit of profound humility, at the same time with perfect independence of expression. It is as follows :—

"My dear Sir,—You may perhaps be surprised to see yourself addressed in this manner by one who never had the happiness of being in company with you, and whose knowledge of your character is drawn solely from the perusal of your poems. But, sir, though I am not personally acquainted with you, I may almost venture to affirm, that the qualities of your soul are not unknown to me. In your poems I discovered such marks of delicate feeling, such benevolence of disposition, and such knowledge of human nature, as made an impression on my mind that nothing will ever efface; and while I felt my soul refined by the sentiments contained in them, and filled with those delightful emotions which it would be almost impossible to describe, I entertained for you an attachment made up of love and admiration: reflection upon that delight which I enjoyed from reading your poems, will ever

make me regard you with gratitude, and the consciousness of feeling those emotions you delineate makes me proud to regard your character with esteem and admiration. In whatever view you regard my behaviour in writing this letter, whether you consider it as the effect of ignorance and conceit, or correct taste and refined feeling, I will, in my own mind, be satisfied with your opinion. To receive a letter from you would afford me more happiness than any occurrence in this world, save the happiness of my friends, and greatly enhance the pleasure I receive from reading your *Lyrical Ballads*. Your silence would certainly distress me; but still I would have the happiness to think that the neglect even of the virtuous cannot extinguish the sparks of sensibility, or diminish the luxury arising from refined emotions. That luxury, sir, I have enjoyed; that luxury your poems have afforded me, and for this reason I now address you. Accept my thanks for the raptures you have occasioned me; and however much you may be inclined to despise me, know at least that these thanks are sincere and fervent. To you, sir, mankind are indebted for a species of poetry which will continue to afford pleasure while respect is paid to virtuous feelings, and while sensibility continues to pour forth tears of rapture. The flimsy ornaments of language, used to conceal meanness of thought and want of feeling, may captivate for a short time the ignorant and unwary, but true taste will discover the imposture, and expose the authors of it to merited contempt. The real feelings of human nature, expressed in simple and forcible language, will, on the contrary,

please those only who are capable of entertaining them, and in proportion to the attention which we pay to the faithful delineation of such feelings, will be the enjoyment derived from them. That poetry, therefore, which is the language of nature, is certain of immortality, provided circumstances do not occur to pervert the feelings of humanity, and occasion a complete revolution in the government of the mind.

"That your poetry is the language of nature, in my opinion, admits of no doubt. Both the thoughts and expressions may be tried by that standard. You have seized upon those feelings that most deeply interest the heart, and that also come within the sphere of common observation. You do not write merely for the pleasure of philosophers and men of improved taste, but for all who think—for all who feel. If we have ever known the happiness arising from parental or fraternal love; if we have ever known that delightful sympathy of souls connecting persons of different sex; if we have ever dropped a tear at the death of friends, or grieved for the misfortunes of others; if, in short, we have ever felt the more amiable emotions of human nature,—it is impossible to read *your* poems without being greatly interested and frequently in raptures; your sentiments, feelings, and thoughts are therefore exactly such as ought to constitute the subject of poetry, and cannot fail of exciting interest in every heart. But, sir, your merit does not solely consist in delineating the real features of the human mind under those different aspects it assumes, when under the influence of various passions and feelings; you have, in a manner truly admirable,

explained a circumstance, very important in its effects upon the soul when agitated, that has indeed been frequently alluded to, but never generally adopted by any author in tracing the progress of emotions,—I mean that wonderful effect which the appearances of external nature have upon the mind when in a state of strong feeling. We must all have been sensible, that when under the influence of *grief*, Nature, when arrayed in her gayest attire, appears to us dull and gloomy, and that when our hearts bound with joy, her most deformed prospects seldom fail of pleasing. This disposition of the mind to assimilate the appearances of external nature to its own situation, is a fine subject for poetical allusion, and in several poems you have employed it with a most electrifying effect. But you have not stopped *here*, you have shown the effect which the qualities of external nature have in forming the human mind, and have presented us with several characters whose particular bias arose from that situation in which they were planted with respect to the scenery of nature. This idea is inexpressibly beautiful, and though, I confess, that to me it appeared to border upon fiction when I first considered it, yet at this moment I am convinced of its foundation in nature, and its great importance in accounting for various phenomena in the human mind. It serves to explain those diversities in the structure of the mind which have baffled all the ingenuity of philosophers to account for. It serves to overturn the theories of men who have attempted to write on human nature without a knowledge of the causes that affect it, and who have

discovered greater eagerness to show their own subtlety than arrive at the acquisition of truth. May not the face of external nature through different quarters of the globe account for the dispositions of different nations? May not mountains, forests, plains, groves, and lakes, as much as the temperature of the atmosphere, or the form of government, produce important effects upon the human soul; and may not the difference subsisting between the former of these in different countries, produce as much diversity among the inhabitants as any varieties among the latter? The effect you have shown to take place in particular cases so much to my satisfaction, most certainly may be extended so far as to authorize general inferences. This idea has no doubt struck you; and I trust that if it be founded on nature, your mind, so long accustomed to philosophical investigation, will perceive how far it may be carried, and what consequences are likely to result from it.

"Your poems, sir, are of very great advantage to the world, from containing in them a system of philosophy that regards one of the most curious subjects of investigation, and at the same time one of the most important. But your poems may not be considered merely in a philosophical light, or even as containing refined and natural feelings; they present us with a body of morality of the purest kind. They represent the enjoyment resulting from the cultivation of the social affections of our nature; they inculcate a conscientious regard to the rights of our fellow-men; they show that every creature on the face of the earth is entitled in some measure to our kindness. They prove that in every

mind, *however* depraved, there exist some qualities deserving our esteem. They point out the proper way to happiness. They show that such a thing as perfect misery does not exist. They flash on our souls conviction of immortality. Considered therefore in this view, *Lyrical Ballads* is, to use your own words, the book which I value next to my Bible; and though I may, perhaps, never have the happiness of seeing you, yet I will always consider you as a friend, who has by his instructions done me a service which it never can be in my power to repay. Your instructions have afforded me inexpressible pleasure; it will be my own fault if I do not reap from them much advantage.

"I have said, sir, that in all your poems you have adhered strictly to natural feelings, and described what comes within the range of every person's observation. It is from following out this plan that, in my estimation, you have surpassed every poet both of ancient and modern times. But to me it appears that in the execution of this design you have inadvertently fallen into an error, the effects of which are, however, exceedingly trivial. No feeling, no state of mind ought, in my opinion, to become the subject of poetry, that does not please. Pleasure may, indeed, be produced in many ways, and by means that at first sight appear calculated to accomplish a very different end. Tragedy of the deepest kind produces pleasure of a high nature. To point out the causes of this would be foreign to the purpose. But we may lay this down as a general rule, that no description can please, where the sympathies of our soul are not excited, and no narration interest,

where do we not enter into the feelings of some of the parties concerned. On this principle, many feelings which are undoubtedly natural, are improper subjects of poetry, and many situations, no less natural, incapable of being described so as to produce the grand effect of poetical composition. This, sir, I would apprehend, is reasonable, and founded on the constitution of the human mind. There are a thousand occurrences happening every day, which do not in the least interest an unconcerned spectator, though they no doubt occasion various emotions in the breast of those to whom they immediately relate. To describe these in poetry would be improper. Now, sir, I think that in several cases you have fallen into this error. You have described feelings with which I cannot sympathize, and situations in which I take no interest. I know that I can relish your beauties, and that makes me think that I can also perceive your faults. But in this matter I have not trusted wholly to my own judgment, but heard the sentiments of men whose feelings I admired, and whose understanding I respected. In a few cases, then, I think that even you have failed to excite interest. In the poem entitled 'The Idiot Boy,' your intention, as you inform us in your preface, was to trace the maternal passion through its more subtle windings. This design is no doubt accompanied with much difficulty, but, if properly executed, cannot fail of interesting the heart. But, sir, in my opinion, the manner in which you have executed this plan has frustrated the end you intended to produce by it; the affection of Betty Foy has nothing in it to excite interest. It exhibits merely the effects of

that instinctive feeling inherent in the constitution of every animal. The excessive fondness of the mother disgusts us, and prevents us from sympathizing with her. We are unable to enter into her feelings; we cannot conceive ourselves actuated by the same feelings, and consequently take little or no interest in her situation. The object of her affection is indeed her son, and in that relation much consists, but then he is represented as totally destitute of any attachment towards her; the state of his mind is represented as perfectly deplorable, and, in short, to me it appears almost unnatural that a person in a state of complete idiotism should excite the warmest feelings of attachment in the breast even of his mother. This much I know, that among all the people ever I knew to have read this poem, I never met one who did not rise rather displeased from the perusal of it, and the only cause I could assign for it was the one now mentioned. This inability to receive pleasure from descriptions such as that of 'The Idiot Boy,' is, I am convinced, founded upon established feelings of human nature, and the principle of it constitutes, as I daresay you recollect, the leading feature of Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments. I therefore think that, in the choice of this subject, you have committed an error. You never deviate from nature; in you that would be impossible; but in this case, you have delineated feelings which, though natural, do not please, but which create a certain degree of disgust and contempt. With regard to the manner in which you have executed your plan, I think too great praise cannot be bestowed upon your talents.

You have most admirably delineated the idiotism of the boy's mind, and the situations in which you place him are perfectly calculated to display it. The various thoughts that pass through the mother's mind are highly descriptive of her foolish fondness, her extravagant fears, and her ardent hopes. The manner in which you show how bodily sufferings are frequently removed by mental anxieties or pleasures, in the description of the cure of Betty Foy's female friend, is excessively well managed, and serves to establish a very curious and important truth. In short, everything you proposed to execute has been executed in a masterly manner. The fault, if there be one, lies in the plan, not in the execution. This poem we heard recommended as one in your best manner, and accordingly it is frequently read in this belief. The judgment formed of it is, consequently, erroneous. Many people are displeased with the performance; but they are not careful to distinguish faults in the plan from faults in the execution, and the consequence is, that they form an improper opinion of your genius. In reading any composition, most certainly the pleasure we receive arises almost wholly from the sentiment, thoughts, and descriptions contained in it. A secondary pleasure arises from admiration of those talents requisite to the production of it. In reading the 'Idiot Boy,' all persons who allow themselves to think, must admire your talents, but they regret that they have been so employed, and while they esteem the author, they cannot help being displeased with his performance. I have seen a most excellent painting of an idiot, but it created in me inexpressible disgust. I

admired the talents of the artist, but I had no other source of pleasure. The poem of the 'Idiot Boy' produced upon me an effect in every respect similar. I find that my remarks upon several of your other poems must be reserved for another letter. If you think this one deserves an answer, a letter from Wordsworth would be to me a treasure. If your silence tells me that my letter was beneath your notice, you will never again be troubled by one whom you consider as an ignorant admirer. But, if your mind be as amiable as it is reflected in your poems, you will make allowance for defects that age may supply, and make a fellow-creature happy, by dedicating a few moments to the instruction of an admirer and sincere friend, JOHN WILSON.

"PROFESSOR JARDINE'S, COLLEGE, GLASGOW,
24*th May* 1802.

"WILLIAM WORDSWORTH, Esq.,
Ambleside, Westmoreland, England."[1]

[1] The answer to this letter will be found at page 192, vol. i., of *Memoirs of W. Wordsworth*, by C. Wordsworth, D.D., 1851. For the foregoing letter I am indebted to Mr. W. Wordsworth, son of the poet, who kindly sent it to me, and also pointed out the reply, which is introduced in the *Memoirs* without a hint as to whom it was addressed.

## CHAPTER III.

### LOVE AND POETRY—LIFE AT OXFORD.

### 1803-8.

"THEN, after all the joys and sorrows of these few years, which we now call transitory, but which our BOYHOOD felt as if they would be endless—as if they would endure for ever—arose upon us the glorious dawning of another new life,—YOUTH, with its insupportable sunshine and its agitating storms. Transitory, too, we now know, and well deserving the same name of dream. But while it lasted, long, various, and agonizing, as, unable to sustain the eyes that first revealed to us the light of love, we hurried away from the parting hour, and looking up to moon and stars, invocated in sacred oaths, hugged the very heavens to our heart."

These sentences contain one among many references in my father's writings to an episode in his early life, of which, had we only these incidental and sometimes imaginative allusions to guide us, no more could be said by the veracious biographer, than that, at the age when nature so ordains, this ardent and precocious youth was passionately in love. So brief and general a statement, however, would but very poorly express the realities of the case, or indicate the depth of the influence which that first overwhelming passion exerted on the whole

nature of John Wilson. As he has himself said, "What is mere boy-love but a moonlight dream? Who would weep—who would not laugh over the catastrophe of such a bloodless tragedy? . . . But love affairs, when the lovers are full-grown men and women, though perhaps twenty years have not passed over either of their heads, are at least tragi-comedies, and, sometimes, tragedies; closing, if not in blood, although that too, when the Fates are angry, yet in clouds that darken all future life, and that, now and then, lose their sullen blackness only when dissolving, through the transient sunshine, in a shower of tears." Such a love affair was this, now for the first time to be made known beyond a circle consisting of some three or four persons that are alive.

In that note-book, already made use of, the names of two ladies frequently are noted. It may be seen that his visits to them were not paid after the fashion of formal courtesy, and that Miss W. and Miss M. had made Dychmont to him a charmed place. Towards autumn, when walks along the banks of the Clyde begin to be delightful, these notices are of almost daily occurrence. One day he calls at Dychmont; then he drinks tea with Miss W. and Miss M.: he rides to Cumbernauld with Miss W.: "Very pleasant and agreeable ride;" again, "drank tea at Dychmont;" then for the next three days at home, and begins his essay "On the Faculty of Imagination;" next evening it is again, "Drank tea at Dychmont;" and so on through the month,—nothing but Dychmont, walking, riding, breakfasting, dining, supping, "at Dychmont," or "with Dychmont ladies" somewhere.

This attractive place was but a simple farm-house,

unadorned and almost homely, but the country around it was delightful. The hill, from which it takes its name, is part of the Dukedom of Hamilton, and from its summit, the valley of the Clyde, from Tinto to the mountains of the west, presents a view of great beauty. No portion of the Clyde is without beauty; for the most part, more noble than the Rhine, with a sweep of water quite as majestic, it flows through a variety of country ever embellished by its presence. Along the banks of the Clyde and Calder were all the favourite walks of John Wilson, for there were "Hallside," "Calder Bank," "Millheugh," "Calderwood," and "Torrance," which, in later years, carried from Dychmont its attraction, and became the scene of joy and sorrow, deep as ever moved a young poet's heart.

The occupants of Dychmont were two ladies, Miss W. and Margaret, as I may simply name her; the one the guardian of the other, an "orphan maid" of "high talent and mental graces," with fascination of manners sufficient to rivet the regard of a youth keenly alive to such charms. At the time of Wilson's residence in Glasgow these ladies were the most intimate friends he had beyond the circle of his youthful companions. During winter they lived in the College Buildings, and were frequent visitors at Professor Jardine's, so that every opportunity existed for the cultivation of a friendship that gradually ripened into love, "life-deep" and passionate on the one side; on the other sincere and tender, but tranquil and self-contained, as if presaging, with woman's instinct, the envious barriers that were to keep their two lives from flowing into one.

At the date when their acquaintance began, John Wilson had that composed and perfected manner which is acquired intuitively by the gentler sex, and gives them an advantage in society rarely possessed by boys at the same age. Thus Margaret, though no longer a school-girl, was delighted to find a companion so congenial as to excite at once her interest and friendship; while young Wilson saw in the "orphan-maid" a creature to admire and love, with all that fervour which belonged to his poetical temperament. Their occupations encouraged the growth of graceful accomplishments; nor were their rides and walks merely pastimes of pleasure; sterner matter arose from those early hours, and we have words of the past that make every line of this love-passage a tale of sorrow, sad enough for tears. A few years of this bright spring-tide of youth pass away, and one heart feels the gentle quiet of its womanly interest gliding insensibly and surely into something more deep and agitating, as does the dewy calm of day-break into the fervent splendour of noon. The love of a poet is seldom so submissive as that which long ago wrote its touching confession in these words:—

"Brama assai, poco spera, e nulla chiede."

Trace this story further, and we see two years later that deeper feelings were brought into play; and though the high-minded Margaret gave no assurance to her lover entitling him to regard her heart as bound to him, it is at least apparent that when, at the end of that time, he left Scotland for Oxford, their communings had been such that the heart of the young poet looked back to them as recalling memories of "unmingled

bliss." There is in the essay on "Streams" an imaginative episode, manifestly *founded* on reality; but as manifestly designed to be a skilful mystification of his real and unforgotten experience. As he *naïvely* hints at the end, "there is some truth in it;" truth to this extent, undoubtedly, that in "that gloomy but ever-glorious glen," of which he speaks, young John Wilson and Margaret did meet many a time, and hold sweet converse together; that to her sympathizing ear he poured forth the aspirations of as pure and ardent a love as ever dwelt in the breast of youth; and that the recollection of those happy hours, and of her many modest charms, working in a nature of fiery susceptibility and earnestness, drove him afterwards, when clouds came over the heaven of his dreams, to the very brink of despair. The colouring of imagination has transformed the picture in "Streams" into a vision of things that never were; but there is no fiction in the description of that passion as having "stormed the citadel of his heart, and put the whole garrison to the sword," or, elsewhere, as "a life-deep love, call it passion, pity, friendship, brotherly affection, all united together by smiles, sighs, and tears."

Of his life, from the date last mentioned to the time of his leaving Glasgow for Oxford, I have unfortunately no memorial in the shape of letters, his correspondence with his aunt already referred to, who was his confidante and constant correspondent throughout, having been irretrievably lost. There has come to my hands, however, a memorial of his love for Margaret, consisting of an octavo volume of "Poems" in MS., written in that

fair and beautiful hand which he wrote up to the time when (it is no fancy to say so) the "fever of the soul" begins to show itself in the impetuous tracings of his pen. It is without date, but must have been written before he left Glasgow. On the title-page, facing which are two dedicatory verses, is the inscription, "Poems on various subjects, by John Wilson," with a poetical quotation below. On the next leaf is this inscription :—

TO
MARGARET,
THE FOLLOWING LITTLE POEMS,
WHICH OWE ANY BEAUTY THEY POSSESS
TO THE DELICACY OF HER FEELINGS,
AND THE EMOTIONS SHE HAS INSPIRED,
ARE, AS A SMALL MARK
OF HIS ESTEEM AND REGARD,
INSCRIBED
BY HER WARMEST FRIEND AND SINCEREST ADMIRER
JOHN WILSON.[1]

After this comes an elaborate Preface of thirty-eight MS. pages, which, considering that it was the composition of a youth under eighteen, is very remarkable

[1] Then follow on the next page these lines :—

TO MARGARET.

If this small offering of a grateful heart
The thrill of pleasure to thy soul impart,
Or teach it e'er that magic charm to feel,
Which thy tongue knows so sweetly to reveal,
Blessed be the breathing language of the line
That speaks of grace and virtues such as thine ;
Blessed be those hours, when, warm'd by love and thee,
I poured the verse in trembling ecstasy !
Oh that the music which these lines contain
Flowed like the murmurs of thy holy strain,
When thy soft voice, clear swelling, loves to pour
The tones of feeling in her pensive hour, etc.

for the ease and grace of the style, the knowledge of poetical literature, the acute critical faculty, and the judicious and elevated sentiments which it displays. This Preface, and the poetical compositions to which it is prefixed, indicate sufficiently that the person to whom they were addressed must have possessed no ordinary mental qualities, and that the relation between her and the writer was founded on a true congeniality of feeling.

The poems are thirty-eight in number, including an "Answer" by Margaret to "Lines" of his. The titles, copied from the table of contents, are given below.[1] There are few of these compositions in which there is not some fond allusion to the lady of his love, and the blissful hours spent by her side. The verses are often commonplace enough; but the sentiments are never other than refined. The adoration is unmistakably genuine, and, though fervent, respectful; tinged with a

[1] *Contents.*—Poem on the Immortality of the Soul. Henry and Helen; a Tale. Caledonia, or Highland Scenery. Verses to a Lady weeping at a Tragedy. The Disturbed Spirit; a Fragment. The Song of the Shipwrecked Slave. The Prayer of the Orphan. The Fate of Beauty. Feeling at parting from a beloved object. Lines on hearing a Lady play upon the Harp. Anna; a Song. Love. Florentine. Parental Affection. Elegy on the Death of Dr. Lockhart. Lines suggested by the fate of Governor Wall. Lines addressed to the Glasgow Volunteers. Osmond; an imitation of M. G. Lewis. The Pains of Memory. The Sun shines bright, etc. I know some people in this world, etc. A Wish. The Child of Misfortune. Mary. To a Lady who said she was not a good judge of Poetry. Lines written at Bothwell Castle. Lines written at Cruikstone Castle. Lines written in Kenmore Hermitage. Lines written at Evening. Prince Charles's Address to his Army before the Battle of Culloden. Who to the Pomp of burnish'd gold, etc. Petition of the Mearns Muir. Lines written in a glen by moonlight. Answer to the above Lines. The Feelings of Love. The Farewell.

sense of gratitude that touches the sympathies even now. Occasionally the strain rises above mere versification into something of real poetry. I refer to this collection not because of its literary merits, but solely on account of its relation to his "Margaret," of whom, and the story of their love, more authentic accounts will be given from his correspondence.

From these gentle occupations, however, Wilson was called away to new scenes and pursuits, fitted to bring forth the whole energies of his many-sided character, but not of power enough to deaden in his heart the recollection of that beloved glen, of Bothwell Banks, and Cruikstone's hoary walls, of Dychmont Hill, and "her the Orphan Maid, so human yet so visionary," that made their very names dear to him for ever.

"Many-towered Oxford" now summoned the young scholar away from the pleasant companionship of his Glasgow friends; and, in the month of June 1803, he entered as a gentleman-commoner of Magdalen College. Full of life and enthusiasm, tall, strong and graceful, quick-witted, well-read, and eloquent, of open heart and open hand, apt for all things honourable and manly, a more splendid youth of nineteen had seldom entered the "bell-chiming and cloistered haunts of Rhedicyna." The effect produced on his mind by the ancient grandeurs of Oxford, naturally stimulated his poetical temperament, and heightened the interest of every study. For there hovered constantly around him suggestions of the high and solemn; he felt that he was in an abode fit for great men and sages, and his soul was

elevated by the contemplation of his scholastic home. Beautifully does he recall in after days the memory of that inspiring time, when, in the fulness of hope and vigour, the fields of the future opened out before him, stretching upwards to the heights of fame, a-glitter in the dew of life's morning:—

"For having bidden farewell to our sweet native Scotland, and kissed, ere we parted, the grass and the flowers with a show of filial tears—having bidden farewell to all her glens, now a-glimmer in the blended light of imagination and memory, with their cairns and kirks, their low-chimneyed huts and their high-turreted halls, their free-flowing rivers and lochs dashing like seas—we were all at once buried not in the Cimmerian gloom, but the cerulean glitter, of Oxford's ancient academic groves. The genius of the place fell upon us. Yes! we hear now, in the renewed delight of the awe of our youthful spirit, the pealing organ in that chapel called the Beautiful; we see the saints on the stained windows; at the altar the picture of one up Calvary meekly bearing the cross! It seemed, then, that our hearts had no need even of the kindness of kindred—of the country where we were born, and that had received the continued blessings of our enlarging love! Yet away went, even then, sometimes our thoughts to Scotland, like carrier-pigeons wafting love-messages beneath their unwearied wings! They went and they returned, and still their going and coming was blessed. But ambition touched us, as with the wand of a magician from a vanished world and a vanished time. The Greek tongue—multitudinous as the sea—kept like the

sea sounding in our ears, through the stillness of that world of towers and temples. Lo! Zeno, with his arguments hard and high, beneath the porch! Plato divinely discoursing in grove and garden! The Stagyrite searching for truth in the profounder gloom! The sweet voice of the smiling Socrates, cheering the cloister's shade and the court's sunshine! And when the thunders of Demosthenes ceased, we heard the harping of the old blind glorious Mendicant, whom, for the loss of eyes, Apollo rewarded with the gift of immortal song! And that was our companionship of the dead!"[1]

Yet these new feelings, and all that fascination which belongs to novelty in "men and manners," could not efface the image of his own familiar Scottish home; and he writes:—

"It is not likely that I will ever like any place of study, that I may chance to live in again, so well as Glasgow College. Attachments formed in our youth, both to places and persons, are by far the strongest that we ever entertain.

"I consider Glasgow College as my mother, and I have almost a son's affection for her. It was there I gathered any ideas I may possess; it was there I entered upon the first pursuits of study that I could fully understand or enjoy; it was there I formed the first binding and eternal friendships; in short, it was there I passed the happiest days of my life.

"I may even there have met with things to disturb me, but that was seldom; and I would, without hesita-

1 "Old North and Young North," *Works*, vol. vi.

tion, enter into an agreement with Providence, that my future life should be as happy as those days. I dare say I left Glasgow at the time I should have left it; my dearest companions had either gone before me, or were preparing to follow me; and had I stayed another year, perhaps my last best friends, Miss W. and Miss M., would not have been in College Buildings; in that case I might as well have been at Japan."

In this honest and unaffected language may be traced that power of local attachment, that clothed every home he found with a sacred interest, interweaving into all the dreams of his memory associations that recalled either some day of unalloyed joy, or some moments of sorrow, hallowed in memory with the "tender grace of a day that is dead."

Of his studies and manner of life at Oxford I have no very minute or extensive memorials. That he was a hard student is sufficiently proved, both by the relics of his industry and by the manner in which he passed his final examination. That he also tasted of the pleasures and diversions open to a lively young Oxonian, possessed of abundant resources,[1] is only to say that he

[1] His father had left him an unencumbered fortune of £50,000. I find the following calculation in one of his memorandum-books, apparently made soon after his coming to Oxford:—"Expenses necessary for an Oxford life for five months amount to about £170; that doubled, to £340; and for the other two months, £50, make £400 the very least possible." I am afraid the "necessary" expenses turned out to be very far short of the actual. The book contains an account of expenditure somewhere up to the month of October 1803, amounting to about £150, which may be considered moderate. But not long after there occurs this significant note:—"I find that I cannot balance my accounts, therefore will henceforth keep only general ones."

*was* a young man, and lived at Oxford for three years and a half. But the general impression that he led what is called a "fast life," and was not a reading man, is by no means correct. His wonderful physical powers gave him indeed great advantages, enabling him to overtake a larger amount of work in a short time than weaker frames could attempt, and to recover with rapidity the loss of hours spent in depressing gloom or hilarious enjoyment. But with all his unaffected relish for the delights of sense, his was a soul that could never linger long among them, without making them "stepping-stones to higher things." Many, doubtless, were his wild pranks and jovial adventures, and for a brief space, as we shall find, he gave himself up, in the agony of blighted hopes, to "unbridled dissipation," if so he might drown the memory of an insupportable grief. All such excess, however, was alien to his nature, which from childhood to old age, preserved that freshness and purity of feeling imparted by Heaven to all true poets, and in few instances utterly lost.

His life at Magdalen College, and his arrangements in regard to his studies, were marked by the same attention to order as had directed his daily course when in Glasgow. It was not till some time after he had left Scotland, that the agitation of harassing thoughts caused a change in the steadiness of his habits, leading him into strange eccentricities in search of peace. But the restlessness and occasional deep depression of his spirit were never of long continuance, otherwise the result might have been destructive. Fortunately, the strength and buoyancy of his nature were too great to

be overcome, and he passed naturally from one condition of feeling to another, according as his spirit was soothed or agitated by outward circumstances. Thus, in the midst of all his sorrows, he is found throwing himself not unfrequently into the full tide of the life that surrounds him, as if he had no other thought; while again he springs off upon some distant walk that takes him miles away, to seek solace in the solitude of the valleys, or drown care among the crowds of a city. Nothing, however, damped his ardour in acquiring knowledge, or in expressing admiration for those who inspired it by their writings. The heroes he worshipped were numerous; and those he loved best have had their beauties recorded in essays of much discriminating power and taste.

One of his first steps for methodizing the results of his study, and improving his mind, was the commencement of a commonplace book, a valuable exercise which he had already begun on a small scale in Glasgow, probably by the advice of Professor Jardine. Of these commonplace books several volumes more or less complete are still extant, giving evidence of an industry and a systematic habit of study very inconsistent with the notion that the writer was an idle or desultory student.[1]

It will be observed, from the extracts I have sub-

[1] "Volume I." is prefaced in the following philosophical style, a few days after his arrival in Oxford: the elaborate plan of study indicated was not, of course, rigidly adhered to:—

"In the following pages I propose to make such remarks upon the various subjects of polite literature as have been suggested to my mind during the course of my studies, by the perusal of writers upon the dif-

joined, that he writes of the manner in which his work is to be arranged with considerable confidence; a tone observable in all he says, not the result of mere youthful self-complacency, but of that consciousness of power which accompanies genius, quickened by the freshness of new studies, and an increasing capacity to discern and appreciate the beauties and difficulties of the subjects laid before him. The various compositions resulting from the above plan, which have been preserved, give the same impression of easy power and well-balanced judgment, combined with a sensitiveness keenly alive to delicacy of thought, and a ready sympathy with those feelings which are excited by natural causes. Unlike most juvenile essays, they display no affected or maudlin sentiment; there is no exaggeration or "fine writing;" the characteristic quali-

ferent branches of human knowledge; reflections upon law, history, philosophy, theology, and poetry, will be classed under separate heads; and if my information upon the useful and interesting subject of political economy can be reduced to any short discussions upon disputed or fundamental principles, or to a collection of maxims, such as form the groundwork of wider inquiries, observations upon the different theories of economists will form part of my projected plan. In following out this general view, it will frequently happen that I shall have occasion to enter fully into the discussion of questions that have been merely suggested to me by the allusion of authors; and, accordingly, essays of some length will constitute a considerable part of my plan.

"With regard to the department of poetry, original verses of my own composition will be frequently introduced, sometimes with the view to illustrate a principle, and often with no other end than self-gratification.

"If, in the course of my epistolary correspondence, any interesting subjects of literature should be discussed, thoughts thus communicated to me will be inserted in the words of the writer, under the head to which they may belong, and accompanied by my own remarks upon them.

"Should any reflections upon men and manners occur to my mind, even

ties, in fact, are clearness and sagacity, the true foundations of good criticism; forming, in conjunction with wide knowledge and sympathies, the *beau-idéal*, afterwards in him exemplified, of what a critic should be, whose judgments will live as *parts* of literature, and not merely talk *about* it. As an example of the qualities now indicated, I may mention an essay out of the first of these two commonplace books, "On the Poetry of Drummond," showing a most discriminating appreciation of a poet whose genius, as he justly says, has never received due acknowledgment. This essay is followed by a very elaborate and ingenious dissertation on the question, "Why have the Egyptians never been remarkable for poetry?" a curious question, which, so far as I am aware, has never formed the subject of special observation. A considerable portion of the volume is occupied with a translation of Sir William Jones's

with regard to the general characters of mankind, or the particular dispositions of acquaintances and friends, they shall be written down as they occur, without any embellishment.

"In short, this commonplace book, or whatever else it may be called, will contain, as far as it goes, a faithful representation of the state of my mind, both in its moments of study and retirement. I will endeavour to concentrate the different radii of information upon literary topics, impressions with regard to human life, and feelings of my own heart in cases when that can be done with good effect. In referring to these pictures of my mind at different periods, I shall be able to estimate the progress I have made in intellectual acquirements, and the various changes that have taken place in my modes of thinking and feeling.

"I shall learn to know myself. In future times it will be pleasing to behold what I once was, and what I once thought; and if I contemplate the acquirements of my youth with anything like contempt, it will, I trust, proceed from a conviction of real superiority and virtue.

"MAGDALEN COLLEGE, *June* 8, 1803."

Observations on Eastern Poetry, and of the specimens, which are very happily rendered. Under date June 27th is the sketch of a proposed poem on the flight of the Israelites out of Egypt, which does not appear, however, to have been entered on. A volume seems to have been set aside for each of the chief branches of study, which from time to time engaged his attention. Some of these are probably lost; and those which remain want a good many leaves in some places. One bears the heading LAW, and contains a survey of the municipal law of England, apparently founded on Blackstone. Another is headed THEOLOGY, and contains a careful review and summary of the evidences of Christianity, based on the study of Paley. Another was intended for HISTORY, but contains, besides some general observations on the study of History, only an essay "concerning Ireland." Another, devoted to his miscellaneous subjects, contains a considerable number of essays and reflections, some pretty elaborate, and displaying a remarkable grasp and comprehensiveness of mind as well as vivacity and grace of style. The following are some of the subjects treated of: The Fear of Death; Female Beauty; Dissipation; Chastity; Religious Worship; The Old Ballad Mania; The Edinburgh Review; the Study of History; the Neglect of Genius in Britain; The Present State of Europe; Longinus as a Critic; The Tendency of Little Poems; Duelling; Modern Poetry; the Martial Character of the Danes; the Decline of the Moorish Power in Spain; the Influence of Climate. These interesting volumes indicate altogether a very extensive range of

study, and thorough mastery of particular topics. It must be remembered too, that these were but the occasional exercises which filled up the intervals of a complete and successful course of classical study. The various poetical effusions and sketches for proposed poems with which some of the volumes are to a great extent filled, belong manifestly to a later period. The most important among these are the original draught of several cantos of the "Isle of Palms," which will call for due notice in a subsequent chapter.

The choice of friends is one of those things which most bring out a man's character and power of discrimination. On this topic I find the following sentences addressed to Margaret:—

"—— is a being in whom I have been most grievously disappointed. When I was first introduced to him I was prejudiced in his favour, for three reasons: —*First*, He was grave, and did not take great part in the conversation, which turned chiefly upon dogs and horses! *secondly*, He was, as I thought, something like Alexander Blair; and, *thirdly*, I was informed he studied a great deal. I accordingly thought that I had fallen upon a good companion. For some time I believed that I had formed a right judgment, thought him a sensible fellow, and, from obscure hints that he dropped, took it into my head that he was a poet. Having, however, one day got into an argument with him concerning the meaning of a line in Homer, I observed an ignorance in him which I was sorry for, and a degree of stupid obstinacy that I despised. This passed; and speaking one day of the Prince, commonly called

the 'Pretender,' he thought proper to remark that his title to the throne was no greater than mine.

"With this I did not altogether agree, and having stated my reasons for dissenting from him, discovered that he was entirely ignorant of the history of his own country. Ignorance so gross as this is at all times pitiable, but more so when disguised under pretended knowledge. I accordingly gradually withdrew from his acquaintance, always preserving strict civility and politeness. At last, having judged it proper to be witty towards me, I wrote an epigram upon him, which it seems he did not like; so he now keeps a very respectful distance. He is a compound of good-nature, obstinacy, ignorance, honour, and conceit, but the bad ingredients are strongest."

The next portrait is of a more pleasing nature:—

"—— is a youth of such reserved manners, that although I was first introduced to him, I scarcely spoke twenty words to him to which I received any other answer than Yes, or No, for the first twenty days. Now, I know him rather better, and begin to like him.

"He sometimes condescends to laugh at a joke, but never to make one. He is a very close student, and I believe the first scholar in the College among the gentlemen-commoners. His father is the best Greek scholar in England, and I have given this youth the surname of Sophocles, a famous Greek tragedian. He has a taste for the Fine Arts, and paints, and plays upon the piano; but he is the worst hand at both I ever saw or heard. He is good-natured, and a gentleman."

Another still more genial companion is spoken of in the same letter :—

"—— is a young man of large fortune, and still larger prospects, so he does not think it worth his while to study much; but he is naturally very clever; is an elegant classical scholar, writes good verses, and has very amiable dispositions. He lives in the same stair with me, so we are often together, and I am very fond of him. His cousin is also a clever fellow, has lived long in dashing life in London, and is intimate with Kinnaird, Lamb, Lewis, Moore, and other wits in London; 'a merrier man, within the limits of becoming mirth, I never spent an hour's talk withal.' He delights in quizzical verses, and we are writing together a poem called *Magdalen College*, which, should we ever complete, I will send to you."

The journal breaks off here, and we find no more such familiar sketches of "men and manners," but more serious matter, for whatever bears upon work is treated with earnest respect. His obviously methodical study obtained for him that clearness of perception and correctness of knowledge, without which no mind perfectly performs its work. Accuracy may in fact be called the foundation and the stronghold of all properly directed mental energy. There is no fault more common than want of accuracy, and none that might be so easily cured. Great intellect never has it, though cleverness may; and there was no fault of which my father was more intolerant. He often used to say to his children in a spirit of fun, "You know I am never wrong? Whatever I state is correct; whatever I say

is right." It was truly the case with regard to his information.

The early efforts of genius are always interesting, and in his case they are enhanced in value, when it is considered with what they were combined. Very rarely does it happen that the same individual possesses an equal proportion of mental and bodily activity, of intellect and imagination; and the seductions that lie in the way of a youth so gifted, whose path of life is smoothed by fortune, must be taken into account in estimating the use made of his powers. No doubt conscious strength is in itself a spur to high achievements, and the enviable possession of great gifts of mind and body gives, as it were, two lives, fitting a man for a Titan's work. It was this combination of gifts that made Wilson singular among the men of his time; and the preservation of their harmony was proof that, amid the various influences tending to overthrow the balance, a healthy moral nature reigned supreme. The hard-working intellect was not led astray by the fertile imagination; the indefatigable bodily energy and exuberant sportiveness were still subservient to reason; and all worked healthily together, despite the recurring gloom of cheerless days, and the restless wanderings that hardly brought repose.

Judged by his poems alone, Wilson was to be classed with the most refined and sensitive of idealists; tested by some of his prose writings and his professional reputation, he was one of the most acute and eloquent of moralists. That such a man should have delighted in angling and in boating, in walking, running, and leap-

ing, is not extraordinary; but that he should also have practically encouraged, and greatly enjoyed the ruder pastimes of wrestling, boxing, and cock-fighting, may appear to some people anomalous. For the notion is not yet wholly extinct, that a poet should be a delicate and dreamy being, all heart and nerves, and certainly destitute of muscles; while the philosopher is held bound to be solemn and dyspeptic, dwelling in a region of clouds remote from all the business and pleasures of men. It is unnecessary, I presume, to show the absurdity of such views. But neither is it necessary to say a word in favour of the cock-pit or the prize-ring. Suffice it, that at the time when my father studied at Oxford, there were few young gentlemen, with any pretensions to manliness, by whom these now proscribed amusements were not zealously patronized. The fashions change with the generations, and the fox-hunter may ere long be considered a barbarian, and the deer-stalker a kind of assassin. Certain it is, that literary men do not now patronize cock-fighting, and the world would probably be scandalized to hear of Mr. Dickens inviting a party of friends to "a main."[1] Yet about this time there was a regular cock-pit in Edinburgh, patronized by "many gentlemen still alive," says the

[1] Although it has been said that the sage and refined Henry Mackenzie did not consider it inconsistent with his character to patronize this amusement, I must omit his name from the number. He was very fond of field sports, but I am assured, on the best authority, that there is not a word of truth in the tradition, nor in the following capital story, quoted from Burgon's *Life of Tytler*:—"Drinking tea there (at Woodhouselee) one evening, we waited some time for Mr. Mackenzie's appearance; he came in at last, heated and excited: 'What a glorious evening I have had!' We thought he spoke of the weather, which was beautiful; but he went on to

Editor of Kay's *Biographical Sketches* in 1842, who would not, perhaps, relish being reminded of "their early passion for the birds."[1] John Wilson was a keen patron of this exciting, though to our eyes, cruel amusement; so much so, that at Elleray he kept, as we shall presently find, a most extensive establishment of cocks, whose training and destinies evidently occupied no small share of his attention. While unable to appreciate fully the merits of this ancient but now almost extinct amusement, I would observe that, in his case, the mere pleasure in the exhibition of animal courage was connected with a more deep and comprehensive delight in the animals themselves. For, from those earliest days, when he made the acquaintance of peaseweeps in the midst of lightning and rain, he had been a keen observer of the habits of all kinds of birds; and he never ceased to take a special interest in them and their ways. I would also remark, that even in those years of student life, when he mixed with all sorts of company, and took his pleasure from the most diversified sources, the study of human nature was truly a great part of his enjoyment. He went among the various grades of men and character much as a geologist goes peering among the strata of the earth; and as a naturalist is not blamed who has his pet beasts and insects,

detail the intense enjoyment he had had in a cock-fight. Mrs. Mackenzie listened some time in silence; then looking up in his face, she exclaimed in her gentle voice, 'Oh, Harry, Harry, your feeling is all on paper!'"

[1] A few years earlier a "main" was fought in the kitchen of the Assembly Rooms, then unfinished, between the counties of Lanark and Haddington, of which Kay gives a vivid picture,—photographing the better known cockers who were present on the occasion.

to us repulsive, so perhaps may such a student of men and their manners be rightly fulfilling his vocation, even when he descends to occasional companionship with the stranger types of humanity.

An old hand at the Cockpit, Oxford.

Of his pugilistic skill, it is said by Mr. De Quincey, that "there was no man who had any talents, real or fancied, for thumping or being thumped, but he had experienced some *preeing* of his merits from Mr. Wilson. All other pretensions in the gymnastic arts he took a pride in humbling or in honouring; but chiefly his examinations fell upon pugilism; and not a man, who could either 'give' or 'take,' but boasted to have

punished, or to have been punished by *Wilson of Mallen's.*"[1]

One anecdote may suffice in illustration of this subject, having, I believe, the merit of being true. Meeting one day with a rough and unruly wayfarer, who showed inclination to pick a quarrel, concerning right of passage across a certain bridge, the fellow obstructed the way, and making himself decidedly obnoxious, Wilson lost all patience, and offered to fight him. The man made no objection to the proposal, but replied that he had better not fight with *him*, as he was so and so, mentioning the name of a (then not unknown) pugilist. This statement had, as may be supposed, no effect in damping the belligerent intentions of the Oxonian; he knew his own strength, and his skill too. In one moment off went his coat, and he set to upon his antagonist in splendid style. The astonished and *punished* rival, on recovering from his blows and surprise, accosted him thus: "You can only be one of the two; you are either Jack Wilson or the Devil." This encounter, no doubt, led, for a short time, to fraternity and equality over a pot of porter.

His attainments as a leaper were more remarkable. For this exercise he had, in the words of the writer already quoted, "two remarkable advantages. A short trunk and remarkably long legs gave him one-half his advantage in the noble science of leaping; the other half was pointed out to me by an accurate critic in these matters, as lying in the particular conformation of his foot, the instep of which is arched, and the back of the

[1] *Edinburgh Literary Gazette*, vol. i. No. 6.

heel strengthened in so remarkable a way, that it would be worth paying a penny for a sight of them." After referring to the boastful vanity of the celebrated Cardinal du Perron on this point, he adds :—"The Cardinal, by his own account, appears to have been the flower of Popish leapers; and, with all deference to his Eminence, upon a better assurance than that, Professor Wilson may be rated, at the time I speak of, as the flower of all Protestant leapers. Not having the Cardinal's foible of connecting any vanity with this little accomplishment, knowing exactly what could, and what could *not* be effected in this department of gymnastics, and speaking with the utmost simplicity and candour of his failures and his successes alike, he might always be relied upon, and his statements were constantly in harmony with any collateral testimony that chance happened to turn up."

His most remarkable feat of this kind, the fame of which still lingers round the spot where it took place, is thus referred to by himself :—"A hundred sovereigns to five against any man in England, doing twenty-three feet on a dead level, with a run and a leap on a slightly inclined plane, perhaps an inch to a yard. We have seen twenty-three feet done in great style, and measured to a nicety, but the man who did it (aged twenty-one, height, five feet eleven inches, weight, eleven stone) was admitted to be (Ireland excepted) the best far leaper of his day in England."[1]

This achievement, worthy of one of Dr. Dasent's favourite heroes, took place in the presence of many

[1] "Essay on Gymnastics."

spectators, at a bend of the Cherwell, a tributary of the Isis, where it glides beautifully through the enamelled meads of Christ Church, the leap being taken across the stream.

To one so full of life, and of the enjoyment of it in its various phases, Oxford was prolific ground for the exercise of his vivacious spirit; and it will naturally be expected that in connexion with this period, there are many curious stories to unfold. But the flight of years soon obliterates the traces of past adventures; very few of the contemporaries of those pleasant days survive; and I am sorry, therefore, to say, that I have been able to gather but few authentic details regarding this portion of my father's life. Every one knows how a story, when it has passed from its original source, is, in an incredibly short space of time, so metamorphosed, as not again to be recognisable; complexion, manner, matter, all changed—just as if loving and making a lie were a matter of duty. Sensible persons, too, are sometimes found credulous of strange tales; while the world, in general, is ever ready to pick up the veriest rubbish, and complacently exclaim, "How characteristic; so like the man." Few men have had more fables thus circulated regarding them than my father. Perhaps the most foolish story that was ever told of him, is one that William and Mary Howitt allude to with wise incredulity, in their pleasant yet somewhat incorrect memorial of him, and which now, to the disappointment of not a few, must be denied *in toto*. It was said that, when wandering in Wales, he joined a gang of gipsies, and married a girl belonging to that nomade tribe, and lived

with her for some time among the mountains. That he had acted along with strolling players, and that there was one company to which he was kind and generous, is quite true; but that he lived with them, or any other adventurers, is mere romance, "the baseless fabric of a vision."

A journal of his wanderings through Wales and the south of England, the Lake District, the Highlands, and Ireland, would have been more amusing than most books of travel, for we have his own word for it that they were sometimes "full of adventure and scrape." But of these journeys he kept no record, and all that can now be gleaned is an incidental allusion here and there in his works.[1]

The circle of his acquaintance at Oxford was most extensive, from the learned President of his College, Dr. Routh, with whom, as De Quincey says, "he enjoyed an unlimited favour," down through "an infinite gamut of friends and associates, running through every key, the diapason closing full in groom, cobbler, and stable-boy." But though a universal favourite, his circle of intimate friends was more select. Among these were Mr. Home Drummond (of Blair-Drummond), Mr. Charles Parr Burney, Reginald Heber; Mr. Sibthorpe, brother of

1 "'*The Tipperary shillelaghs came tumbling about his nob as thick as grass.*' This is a sweet pastoral image, which we ourselves once heard employed by a very delicate and modest young woman in a cottage near Limerick, when speaking of the cudgels in an affray. A broken head is in Ireland always spoken of in terms of endearment; much of the same tender feeling is naturally transferred to the shillelagh that inflicted it. 'God bless your honour!' said the same gentle creature to us while casting an affectionate look of admiration on our walking-stick. '*You would give a swate blow with it.*'"—*Blackwood*, vol. v. p. 667.

the late Colonel Sibthorpe; Mr. N. Ellison, Mr. Charles Edward Grey. None of these gentlemen was of his own college.

An anecdote may here be given, illustrating a somewhat unusual mode of shutting up a proctor. One evening one of these important functionaries was aroused to the exercise of his authority by a considerable noise in the High Street. Coming forth to challenge the authors of the unlawful uproar, he found that "Wilson of Magdalen's" was the prime author of the disturbance. Remonstrance and warning were alike thrown away on the indomitable youth; he had put on his "boldest suit of mirth, for he had friends that purposed merriment." Nothing could be made of him. In vain the proctor advanced; he was received with speeches, and a perfect flood of words. The idea of repose was flouted by this incorrigible youth. Still the proctor protested, until he was fairly driven away by Wilson repeating to him, with imperturbable gravity, nearly the whole of Pope's "Essay on Man."

I am glad to be able to make up, in some respects, for the meagreness of these outlines, by some very interesting reminiscences kindly furnished by one who truly says, that he is "perhaps the only person now living who could give so many details at the end of half a century:"—

"I became acquainted with the late Professor Wilson at Magdalen College, Oxford, about the year 1807 or 1808. He had already graduated, taken even (as I best recollect) his Master's degree, when I entered that College as a gentleman-commoner. His personal

appearance was very remarkable; he was a powerfully built man, of great muscular strength, about five feet ten inches high, a very broad chest, wearing a great profusion of hair and *enormous* whiskers, which in those days were very unusually seen, particularly in the University. He was considered the strongest, most athletic, and most active man of those days at Oxford; and certainly created more interest amongst the gowns-men than any of his contemporaries, having already greatly distinguished himself in the schools, and as a poet.

"The difference of our standing in the College, as well as of our ages and pursuits, did not allow of our forming any *close* intimacy, and we seldom met but in our common room, to which the gentlemen-commoners retired from the dining-hall for wine and dessert, to spend the evening, and to sup, etc.

"I am not able to say who were Wilson's intimates in the University; he certainly had none in the College. I rather think he was much with Mr. Gaisford, the celebrated Grecian. I think, of *our* men, Mr. Edward Synge, of the county of Clare, saw the most of him. The fact is we were all *pigmies*, both physically and mentally, to him, and therefore unsuited to general companionship. It was therefore in the conviviality of our common room, to which Wilson so much contributed, and which he so thoroughly himself enjoyed, that we had the opportunity of appreciating this (even then) extraordinarily gifted man, who combined the simplicity of a child with the learning of a sage. He was sometimes, but rarely silent, abstracted for a time,

which I attributed to his mind being then occupied with composition. He never seemed unhappy.

"It was the habit and fashion of those days to drink what would now be considered freely; the observance was not neglected at *Maudlin*, though never carried to excess. Wilson's great conversational powers were drawn out during these social hours. He delighted in discussions, and would often advance paradoxes, even in order to raise a debate. It was evident that (like Dr. Johnson) he had not determined which side of the argument he would take upon the question he had raised. Once he had decided *that* point, he opened with a flow of eloquence, learning and wit, which became gradually an absolute torrent, upon which he generally tided into the small hours. No interruption, no difference of opinion, however warmly expressed, could ruffle for a moment his imperturbable good temper. He was certainly one of the most charming social companions it has ever been my lot to meet, although I have known some of the most agreeable and witty that Ireland has produced. There was a versatility of talent and eloquence (*not of opinions*) in Wilson, such as I have never seen equalled. I have heard him with equal cleverness argue in favour and disparagement of constitutional, absolute, and democratic forms of government; one evening you would suppose him to be (*as he really was*) a most determined, unbending Tory; the next he assumed to be a thorough Whig of the old school; on a third, you would conclude him to be a violent and dangerous democrat! You could never suppose that the same man could uphold and

decry with equal talent, propositions so opposite: and yet he did, and was equally persuasive and conclusive upon each. In the same manner with religious discussions: to-day there could be no more energetic and able 'defender of the Faith;' to-morrow he would advance Voltaireism, Hobbism, and Gibbonism enough to induce those who did not know him to conclude that he was a thorough unbeliever. He was, on the contrary, of a highly pious and religious mind. I may sum up his characteristics as they appeared to me, in a few words: simplicity, kindness, learning, with *chivalry;* for certainly his views and sentiments were highly chivalrous, and had he lived in those days, he would have been found among the foremost of 'les preux chevaliers.'

"The established rule of our common room was, that no one should appear there without being in full evening dress; non-compliance involved a fine of one guinea, which Wilson had more than once incurred and paid. Having one day come in in his morning garb, and paid down the fine, he asked, 'What then do you consider dress?' 'Silk stockings,' etc. etc. was the answer. The next day came Wilson, looking very well satisfied with himself, and with us all; now, he cried, '*All is right*, I hope to have no more fines to pay; you see I have complied with the rules,' pointing to his silk stockings, which he had very carefully *drawn over* the coarse woollen walking stockings which he wore usually; his strong shoes he still retained!

"He told us one evening that he imagined he had a taste for, and might become proficient in music, and

that he would commence to practise the French horn! which he did accordingly, commencing after we had broken up for the night, which was generally long after twelve. Some days after, old Dr. Jenner, one of the Fellows, accosted me with piteous tones and countenance: 'Oh, Southwell! do, for pity's sake, use your influence with Wilson to choose some other time for his music-lessons; I never get a wink of sleep after he commences!' I accordingly spoke to him; he seemed quite surprised that his dulcet notes could have disturbed his neighbours; but he was too good-natured to persevere, and, as far as I know, his musical talents were no further cultivated. Being a Master of Arts, he was no longer subject to college discipline, and might have, if he wished, accompanied his horn with a big drum! One of his great amusements was to go to the 'Angel Inn,' about midnight, when many of the up and down London coaches met; there he used to preside at the passengers' supper-table, carving for them, inquiring all about their respective journeys, why and wherefore they were made, who they were, etc.; and in return, astonishing them with his wit and pleasantry, and sending them off wondering *who and what* HE *could be!* He frequently went from the 'Angel' to the 'Fox and Goose,' an early 'purl and gill' house, where he found the coachman and guards, etc., preparing for the coaches which had left London late at night; and there he found an audience, and sometimes remained till the college-gates were opened, rather (I believe) than rouse the old porter, Peter, from his bed to open for him expressly. It must not be supposed, that in these

strange meetings he indulged in *intemperance;* no such thing; he went to such places, I am convinced, to study character, in which they abounded. I never saw him show the slightest appearance even of drink, notwithstanding our wine-drinking, suppers, punch, and smoking in the common room, to very late hours. I never shall forget his figure, sitting with a long earthen pipe, a great *tie* wig on; those wigs had descended, I fancy, from the days of Addison (who had been a member of our College), and were worn by us all (in order, I presume, to preserve our hair and dress from tobacco smoke) when smoking commenced, after supper; and a strange appearance we made in them!

"His pedestrian feats were marvellous. On one occasion, having been absent a day or two, we asked him on his return to the common room, where he had been? He said, in London. When did you return? This morning. How did you come? On foot. As we all expressed surprise, he said: 'Why, the fact is, I dined yesterday with a friend in Grosvenor (I think it was) Square, and as I quitted the house, a fellow who was passing was impertinent and insulted me, upon which I knocked him down; and as I did not choose to have myself called in question for a street row, I at once started, as I was, in my dinner dress, and never stopped until I got to the College gate this morning, as it was being opened.' Now this was a walk of fifty-eight miles at least, which he must have got over in eight or nine hours at most, supposing him to have left the dinner-party at nine in the evening.[1]

[1] Mr. Southwell's statement may seem an exaggeration; but a reference

"He had often spoken to me when at Oxford of a protracted foot-tour which he had made in Ireland some years previous, and about which there appeared to me a sort of mystery, which he did not explain.

"R. H. S."[1]

to Mr. Findlay's account, at p. 36, will show that my father had easily performed six miles an hour in what I take for granted to be a more difficult mode of progression than the ordinary, viz., "toe and heel."

[1] As a tail-piece to Mr. Southwell's letter, I take the liberty of inserting here another of Mr. Lockhart's Hogarthian sketches, containing, I have no doubt, correct, if not very flattering portraits of some of the Oxford dignitaries of that day. The "strictures of the *Edinburgh Review*," which appear to have excited so much dissatisfaction, were contained in two articles in the *Review* of July 1809 and of April 1810, in which some of the weak points of the contemporary system of education at Oxford were handled with a roughness characteristic of the criticism of that period.

"The strictures of the *Edinburgh Review* considered as a private meeting of the Caput, A.D. 1810.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE ORPHAN MAID—UNIVERSITY CAREER.

1803-8.

THE course of true love, whether calm or troubled, whether issuing in sunshine or in storm, is "an old, old story;" but it is one that sums up the chiefest joys and sorrows of men and women, and can only be regarded with indifference by those who are dead to the influence of all deep and worthy emotions. The best and brightest spirits have shown how their lives were ennobled by the passion of love, the faith and purity of which in one heart were the spring of the finest song that ever immortalized genius, and the highest compliment that ever was paid to woman. Should it sometimes happen, when the heart is overburdened with its weight of sorrow, that comfort and forgetfulness are sought in the tumultuous excitements of life, it does not always follow that nature becomes lowered, any more than that love is quenched; for nothing in reality can soothe an unfeigned grief but resolution to bear it. Those who can endure a sorrow, whatever its cause, elevate thereby their moral being, experiencing soon that all comfort from outward sources is but vanity. A strong and uncorrupted soul rises ere long above the aid

of idle pleasures, and gratefully turns to the wisdom that teaches submission, believing,

"Tal pose in pace uno ed altro disio."

So was it with John Wilson, to the story of whose early love we now again turn. The reader may have ere this imagined that it was to be heard of no more; that Oxford and its varied excitements had deadened the recollection of Dychmont and Bothwell Banks. So little was it thus, that from all the evidence which letters supply, there seems to have been no portion of his time, during the seven years preceding his permanent settlement at Elleray in which his love for Margaret did not influence the tenor of his existence, inspiring him at one time with ardent hope, oftener sinking him into the deepest anguish, from which he at times sought escape in assumed indifference or reckless dissipation. It shows how little the outward life of such a man can reveal of his whole nature and actual history, that but for these letters we could not have had even a glimpse of what was in reality the dominant thought of his life at Oxford, nor ever known of the trial which brought out so strongly the nobleness of his nature and the depth of his filial love. Had it not been that so many years of his life were spent in the indulgence of a fond hope and engrossing passion, ending in a sacrifice to duty such as few men of spirit so impetuous have ever made, this tale had not been told. It may well move the admiration of all who reverence the power of self-control in tutoring the heart, while its brightest dreams are still objects of faith. It will be seen from these letters how hard it must have been for him to bend before obstruc-

tions, of whose reality and strength he was long in utter ignorance.

Of all his letters to Margaret, the only one that survives of what must have been an extensive correspondence, is one written soon after his arrival at Oxford. Of hers to him there is, I regret to say, none to be found. The pensive simplicity that pervades it is in entire harmony with the strain of the "Poems," and, like the portrait by Raeburn, will perhaps surprise those who may have expected to find young Christopher North addressing the lady of his love in the impassioned and eloquent style of a troubadour: the thing was much too genuine for that:—

"MAGDALEN COLLEGE, OXFORD, *June* 12, 1803.

"Next to seeing yourself, my dear Margaret, and the greatest pleasure I know upon this earth, is that of seeing your writing: and I cannot describe what I felt when I read your letter, even although it contained some little censure for not having written you ere this. When I knew by the direction who it was from, my heart leaped within my breast, and I read it over and over again without intermission, so rejoiced was I to hear from one so dear to me as you are. Indeed I must confess that I was always afraid you would not write me, although this was more an unaccountable presentiment than an apprehension for which, after your promise, I could assign any reason. But where the strongest wishes are, there also are the strongest fears. I see now, however, that you really will write me, and that, I trust, often. What a wretch, therefore, would I

be, were I to deprive myself of such a blessing by my own foolishness! When I read your letters, I will be with you in spirit, notwithstanding the distance between this place and Dychmont. My silence was far from proceeding out of forgetfulness of my promise to write you. Before I could have forgot that, I must have forgot you, which never will be to my dying moment; and should it ever happen, may my God forget me. The truth is, I had several reasons for not writing you sooner. I wished first to have seen your picture, which has not yet arrived, and indeed has scarcely had sufficient time yet. But I should have written you notwithstanding that, had I been able, but believe me when I tell you, that hitherto I was not.

"Whenever I thought of writing to you, I thought of the distance I was from you, of the sadness I suffered when I bade you farewell, and the loss of almost all the happiness I enjoy in this world by no longer seeing you. All this quite overpowered me, and I could no more have written to you than I could tell you that forenoon I last saw you not to forget me when I was away. Your letter has revived me; and if you have any regard for me, which I believe you have, oh, write often, often! You know I am unhappy; comfort me, comfort me! A few lines will delight me, and you are too kind to refuse me such a gratification. It will also serve to keep you in remembrance of me, when perhaps you might otherwise forget me, which, should it ever happen, would complete my sum of wretchedness. If hearing from me will afford you any pleasure, I will write as often as you choose--a small mark of affection surely to one, to serve

whom I would endure anything on the face of the earth. It will also afford myself greater pleasure than you. When I left you, my dear Margaret, you know that I was afraid that Oxford would be to me a dull, unhappy place. You seemed to think not yourself, and believed that the change of situation and novelty of company would make me forget anything that distressed me, and even make me think less on those friends I had left.

"Perhaps though you said this, you did not exactly think it, and wished only to comfort me, which you have so often and so sweetly done. All my suspicions have been verified, and how indeed could it be otherwise? Oxford is a gay place most certainly, and, I daresay, to people whose minds are at ease, a pleasant one; but to me it appears very different. It is true, that when I was in Glasgow I endeavoured to dissipate my melancholy by company, for which I could often feel nothing but contempt, and by pursuits which I heartily despised. I imagined such a course of life might have moderated the violence of what my mind suffered, and I had certainly acquired such a portion of self-command as frequently to appear the happiest and most indifferent person in company. But this conduct did not do. When alone I was worse than ever, and, added to my other distress, had the idea of being guilty of deception, and following conduct unworthy of myself. Accordingly here I follow another plan. I do not dissipate; I live retired. I have no need to follow a course of deception, which, if long persevered in, I could imagine capable in some measure of deadening the sense of right and wrong, and which is at all events grating to the soul.

I now try to read, and have, since I came here, read a great deal; but all won't do; my mind is ill at ease. Once, when I was unhappy, I had only to step across the street, hear your voice, see your face, and take hold of your hand, and for a time I forgot all my sorrow. This now I cannot do. At night I sit in a lonely room, nobody within many miles of me I love, left to my own meditations and the power of darkness, which I have long detested.

"I think of sad things, and weep the more, because I have no hope of relief. In such moments what a treasure will your picture be to me! How it will delight me; make me forget everything on earth but you, and you looking like what you were when you agreed at last to give it to me. Would to God it were here! When, Margaret, you see how happy it will make me, how could you refuse it? And yet to give it me was goodness I had no title to expect, and for which I will often thank you in moments of stillness and solitude. Oh, what a treasure is a friend like you! How little is real friendship understood! Who could ever conceive the happiness I have felt when with you, or so much as dream the misery I endured when I left you for a long, long time! As long as there is a moon or stars in the firmament will I remember you; and when I look on either, the recollection of Dychmont Hill, the house, the trees, the wooden seat, which I am grieved is away, will enter my mind, and make me live over again the happiest period of my existence. Last night I was in heaven. I dreamed that I was sitting in the drawing-room at College Buildings with you

alone, as I have often done. The room was dark, the window-shutters close; the fire was little, and just twinkling. I had my feet upon the fender; you were sitting in the arm-chair; I was beside you; your hand was in mine; we were speaking of my going to Oxford; you were promising to write me; I was sad, but happy; somebody opened the door, and I awoke alone and miserable.

"I have given you my promise not to think of a plan you dissuaded me from carrying into execution. Be assured that I never will change my mind. I consider you as my better angel, for using your simple eloquence to make me abandon the project. It would have been cruel to my dearest friends, and perhaps useless to myself.

"Let none, not even Miss W., see this. Heaven protect you, my dear Margaret, and love you as well as your affectionate friend, JOHN WILSON."

The plan here referred to was a romantic project which he had entertained of going with the expedition of 1804, being Park's second journey to the interior of Africa. Apparently the hostile influences which ultimately prevailed in dividing him and Margaret had begun, before he left Glasgow, to disturb the current of his felicity. However extravagant the idea of a journey to Timbuctoo may appear as a medicine for disappointed love, he unquestionably meant it; and with all the hardships and dangers connected with such an enterprise, it was one highly calculated to excite his imagination and love of adventure. A very old friend thus writes

regarding it:—"He had certainly a wild project of going there, and used to talk of it in his usual enthusiastic way. But I did not imagine it had taken any hold of him till one day he astonished me by appearing in a complete sailor's dress, and told me he was going to join the expedition to Africa. I used all my influence to dissuade him from such a foolish proceeding. You may suppose what dismay he would have occasioned in his own family, who almost worshipped him." To them he never communicated his intentions in the matter, which only became known long after the project had been abandoned.

The next letter from which I shall quote is addressed to his dear friend, Findlay. The post-mark bears the date of "August 16, 1803." What had occurred between that and the month of June to give rise to expressions of despondency so unmeasured can only be conjectured to have been a further development of the cause of distress alluded to in the letter to Margaret.

". . . Since I saw you, my mental anguish has been as great as ever. I feel that I am doomed to be eternally wretched, and that I am cut out from all the most amiable and celestial feelings of human nature. . . . At particular times I am perfectly distracted, and hope that at last the torment my mind suffers may waste a frame that is by nature too strong easily to be destroyed. I daresay few would leave life with fewer lingering looks cast behind. My abilities, understanding, and affections are all going to destruction. I can do nothing; I can't, by Heavens! even assume that appearance of indifference and gaiety I once did,

without a struggle that I cannot support. I started in the career of early life as fair as that of any of my companions, and had, I confess, many hopes of being something in the world. But all these are blasted; I cannot understand anything that I read, and nothing in the world gives, or ever will give me pleasure. I see others enjoying the world, and likely to become respectable and useful members of society; for myself, I expect to be looked at as a being who wants a mind, and to feel inwardly all the torments of hell. By Heavens! I will, perhaps, some day blow my brains out, and there is an end of the matter. If you will take the trouble, when you have nothing else to do, of writing now and then to me, I know it will be one of those few things that keep my heart from dying in my breast, and depend upon it, that every word coming from one whom I regard so dearly as you, will be interesting to me. What the happiness is which you so pleasantly allude to, I cannot understand, unless it be that J. S., yourself, Blair, and I are soon to meet. I will be glad to see you, but the word happy will never again be joined to the name of

"JOHN WILSON."

The next letter, marked "September 1803," shows an improvement in spirits:—

"Your former letters, my dear Bob, so far from offending, or giving me an idea that you are addicted to frivolous levity, relieved in a great measure the burden of my heart. Although few, perhaps, ever suffered more from mental anguish in a short time than

I have done, this suffering has not had the effect of making me look gloomy disapprobation upon the happiness of others. I feel, if all went well with me, I would be one of the happiest of beings that ever saw the light of heaven, and that nothing would be too insignificant to delight me. This conviction has never quitted my heart even in its darkest moments, and has been the means of making me look with complacency upon every kind of innocent and reasonable enjoyment.

"The little girl who brings the newspaper into the room, and trips smilingly along the floor, gives me something like happiness; for, wherever I see joy and peace, I take a sad delight in looking at it. When your letters showed me how pleased you were with your new situation, and that nothing disturbed you there, it gave me much pleasure, therefore I hope you will not leave off that light and happy strain which pervaded them.

"I know that you and I are sworn friends, and that you are interested in everything that concerns me. Nothing, therefore, in your behaviour towards me, will ever appear unfeeling; and what you are afraid I might have mistaken for indifference, I know to be the hallowed voice of friendship. Were you here, I would have an opportunity of pouring out my whole soul to you, and in that I would find much relief.

"But a letter is such a short thing, and to me, sorrow is when written so unintelligible, that in cases of absence I am convinced it is best to say little upon such mournful topics.

"If writing to you, and hearing from you, can divert

my attention from my own mind, much is accomplished; and I assure you that your letters, with the minute superscription, effected this end. Before I go further, your resolution to be sorrowful because I might be happier is very injudicious, upon this principle, that while it hurts yourself, so likewise does it him whom you mean to benefit."

To divert his thoughts he went off in these autumnal days on one of those long solitary rambles which often landed him unpremeditatedly at night in an unknown region, some fifty miles from his starting-point. A glimpse of one of these excursions is afforded in the next letter, the greater portion of which, however, is occupied with an outpouring of his woes. These seem to have received fresh stimulus from an ungrounded alarm that a rival had come between him and the dear object of his anxieties.

"I have been expecting to hear from you for some time past; that is to say, I would not have been greatly astonished though I had heard from you, neither am I in the least surprised that you have not written. As I feel, however, what Wordsworth and other gentlemen of his stamp would think proper to call 'impulse to write 'mid deepest solitude,' I have disregarded entirely the great advance upon the price of writing materials, and will add to the revenue of the Post-Office by the postage of one letter, which you will never grudge to pay, when you have discovered the hidden soul which pervades these effusions. I have lately returned from a walk over a pretty wide extent of country, during which, if at particular times blistered soles and stiff joints did

not vastly increase the pleasures of reflection, other moments amply recompensed me, and gave me enjoyment, though not unalloyed, of as perfect a kind as the general nature of frail humanity, assisted by the workings of particular melancholy, could possibly admit. Without being able to assign any reason for my conduct, though I entered into many philosophical inquiries concerning all the possible combinations of motives, I arrived at Coventry, distant from Oxford fifty miles. The days of riding naked upon horseback being gone, I beheld no elegant nude bestriding a prancing courser, therefore I met with no gratification in the assumed character of peeping Tom. From this foolish place I went to Nottingham, distant fifty-one miles, and stayed there three days."

Here he abruptly dismisses his pedestrian adventures, and enters on the subject more near his heart.

"... What will time do to such love as mine? It is not passion founded on whim and fancy; it is not a feeling of her excellent disposition resembling friendship; it is not a regard that intimacy preserved, but whose force absence may diminish. Such feelings constitute the common love of common souls. But with me the case is different. No holy throb ever agitates my heart; no idea of future happiness ever elevates my spirit; no rush of tenderness ever warms every fibre of my frame, that Margaret is not the cause and object of such emotions. If such a being were to confess she loved me; if she were to sink upon my breast with love and fondness, I would be the happiest being that ever lived among men. I feel I have a mind that could then exert itself, and a

heart that would love all the human race. But if this union is denied me; if she I love reposes on the bosom of another,—then is the chain broke which bound me to the world; I have nothing to live for; all is dark, solitary, cold, wild, and fearful. When Margaret is married, on that night that gives her to another, if I am in any part of this island, you must pass that night with me. Blair will do the same. I don't expect, indeed I won't suffer either of you to soothe the agony of my soul, for that surely were a vain attempt. But you will sit with me. I know I could never pass that night alone. I would crush to death this cursed heart which has so long tormented me, and bless with my latest breath my own Margaret; for she is mine in the secret dwellings of the soul, and not a power in the universe shall tear her from that hospitable home. When I consider the ways of Providence I am astonished. Whoever marries her, let his virtues be what they may, I know he never could make her as happy as I could. He would not love her with so vast and yet so tender a love."

With a true poet's mind, he fears the change an unworthy helpmate would bring to her refined and enlightened spirit:—

"If my rival in her affections were a being superior to myself, I would not repine; at least not so much as I now do, when I am afraid he is unworthy of her, and inferior to me. Does Margaret prefer this man to me? That she does I am afraid is too true. Will he make her as happy as I could? Can he like her as well as I do? Both suppositions are impossible. The wife of a

soldier seldom sees intellectual scenes; and in progress of time that angel Margaret, for whom I would sacrifice everything on earth, may become—oh, I shudder to think of it!—a person of common feelings,[1] and laugh at all I have said to her, at my misery, my love, and my delusions. Such are often the transmigrations of spirit, or rather the transformations which Providence permits to humble the hopes and destroy the happiness of those it made capable of prodigious enjoyment. May I never live to see that day!"

After relieving his breast by this outburst he returns to his walking:—

"I had almost forgot our walking match. I went from Nottingham to Birmingham. There I met Blair. . . . . He intends visiting me, perhaps at Christmas, but I will tell you, however, when I expect him, and you must try to spare a few days from that eternal copying of letters, and see what an appearance an old friend cut in purgatory.

"I have sent, at least am going to send, you a small parcel, containing the sermon I wrote, and a letter to Margaret. You may open the parcel, and read the sermon, if you choose. Pack them up in your best manner, and direct them to Miss M., College Buildings, Glasgow. I suppose you have safe communication with Glasgow, for I would not for the world the parcel

[1] This reminds one of *Locksley Hall*:—

"Is it well to wish thee happy?—having known me, to decline
On a range of lower feelings, and a narrower heart than mine!
Yet it shall be: thou shalt lower to his level day by day,
What is fine within thee growing coarse to sympathize with clay.'

was lost, as the letter is not for every eye, and contains secret feelings.

"Isabella S., I understand, is married. I wish her all possible joy. For God's sake, take care who thou fallest in love with. I wish I had done so, faith!

"The sooner you send Margaret the parcel the better, for I should have written her before now, and she will be wondering at my silence. And let it be safe. Write me when convenient, and don't be interrupted by your mercenary concerns and employments. I would have given you another sheet, from which you are saved by the entrance of the drill-sergeant, who has come to teach me how to fight the French if they come. I am their man. 'God save the King!'—Yours,

"J. WILSON.

"OXFORD, 12*th October* 1803."

The next letter in the series is from Blair to Findlay, showing how deeply these two friends entered into the feelings of one whose trust in them was as that of a brother. It is dated

"HILL TOP, *January* 19, 1804.

"The vacation is over next Tuesday week. I left him on Monday morning last; but one of the gentlemen-commoners came to Oxford for two or three days, and breakfasted, dined, and supped with us on Sunday, so that I had no opportunity of speaking to him on many things of which I wished to have talked to him. From this, it happened that I said nothing to him of what we talked over that Wednesday night. If I had not thought we should have had all Sunday night to our-

selves, I would certainly have spoken of it before; but it is a subject on which I dare not speak to him, except at those moments when he seems happier than usual from my presence. If he is gloomy and dejected, as he is sometimes with me, I know that his mind will be shut to all reasonings favourable to his happiness; and that to touch on that subject would be merely to give him occasion to overwhelm me with one of those long bursts of passion and misery to which I can make no answer. He was out of spirits the first two days I was there; and I thought it most probable that in the last evening he would, from the idea of my going so soon, feel a greater degree of kindness and affection for me, which would keep his mind in a state of gentle feeling, and dispose it more easily to think happily of himself. If we had been alone that night, I should have talked it all over with him. I am doubtful whether I ought to write to him about it."

This affectionate friend did write to him on the subject, and a few days later he again addresses Findlay: –

"Hill Top, *sunset, Tuesday*, 1804.

"I am writing to Wilson, and shall send the letter to-morrow, so that he will get it on Thursday morning. I tell him why I am convinced that he is loved; and what I fear she may be induced to do, both from her delicacy and just pride, which must shrink from the idea of the disapprobation of relations, and from her scrupulous sense of right, which makes her refuse to separate him from those relations. I will say, that she is now guided in everything she does by the resolution

she has formed since he left her, of sacrificing her happiness to her sense of right (she may perhaps think) to his happiness; and I will, on that account, caution him against writing to her on that subject, because she might have strength of mind to write a refusal, that would blast all his hopes, and make him never dare to speak of it to her again. My wish is that he should see her next summer, and force from her a confession of her feelings.

"See what he thinks about P—. He has talked to me as if he feared she was attached to him. P— left his country when she knew nothing more of Wilson than that he was a fine boy, and I think it very probable that at that time she might feel a grateful attachment to him for his love to her, and what she might think his generosity. Does Wilson know so little of her and of himself as to dream for a moment that, after knowing him as she has done for these last three years, her heart can still hold by one wish to such a man as P—? If she has formed any engagement to such a man as P—, God help us! I cannot think it possible. If it had been, she must have acted differently. Her love might overpower in her for a time her sense of what she thinks she owes to the order of society; while her only restraint was the idea that she ought not to separate Wilson from all his family connexions. I can conceive her doing all that she has done with the purest and most virtuous mind, for she acted under a great degree of delusion; I am convinced she did not suspect the consequences to her own heart or to Wilson's. But if she could in the slightest degree look on herself as the

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property of another, everything becomes utterly incomprehensible; a positive engagement leaves no room for delusion, and in that situation a woman of delicate feelings has but one way of acting. I have not time for more.—Yours ever,

"ALEX. BLAIR."

The next letter in my possession is dated March 7, 1804,[1] and may be inserted below for the sake of chrono-

[1] It is little more than a mere catalogue of books, but the playful tone in which the commission is rendered, gives interest and not a little character to the document.

"BOB, you scoundrel, DID you get my last letter? If you can get any bookseller to trust me under my own name, or me under your name, for the following books, until this time twelvemonths, buy them, and send them down as soon as possible. I think that, with proper management, you may manage to get it done.

"1. Fergusson's Roman Republic, in octavo; don't buy it unless in octavo. 2. Mitford's Greece, in octavo; don't buy it unless in octavo. 3. Stewart's edition of Reid's Philosophy. This book is only in octavo, therefore don't buy it unless in octavo. 4. Malthus's Essay on Population—an excellent book—read part of it; most acute thing of the present day. 5. Godwin's Political Justice; don't buy it unless in octavo. 6. Gillies' Greece in octavo; don't buy it unless in octavo. 7. Pinkerton's Ancient Scottish Poems; recollect this is not his Ancient Comic Ballads. 8. All Ritson's publications, except English Romances, and Essay on Abstinence from Animal Food. 9. Hartley on Man; last edition in three vols. octavo, with notes by some foreigner or another. 10. Rousseau's Works, if cheap and complete; thirty-four volumes, or perhaps less; but complete, certainly complete. 11. Regnier's History, if tolerably cheap. 12. Turner's History of the Anglo-Saxons, three vols. 13. *Any good* edition of Gilbert Stuart's Works; also, Mallet's Northern Antiquities, translated. 15. Bisset's History of this Country. 16. All Pinkerton's works indeed you may buy, except his Geography. If possible, let them all be *in boards*. J. WILSON.

"MAGDALEN COLLEGE, *March* 1804,
"*Tuesday Evening.*"

logical order, as showing the kind of studies which were meantime engaging his attention.

From this date down to September of the same year there is no record of his doings. Blair writing to Findlay, September 30th, says:—"I imagine Wilson should be in London about this time to meet his mother. I have not seen him this summer." It may be inferred that he was occupied during the spring with his studies, and struggling as best he could to overcome the dejection of spirits, which, judging from the next letter, did not for a time pass away. During the summer, he went off on a long excursion through Wales, to which he subsequently alludes in no very agreeable terms. It could not fail, however, to arouse his poetic sensibilities, and in one of the commonplace books I find a sketch of an intended poem on this subject, entitled "Hints for the Pedestrian."

The next glimpse of him from correspondence is in a letter from Blair to Findlay, of date November 24, 1804:—

"Wilson has been walking about in Wales all this summer, and is now at Oxford again. I have not once seen him. He says he is going to Scotland in about five weeks. I believe he had better not. John Finlay[1] is to come back with him. I expect to be in London about the middle or end of January, and I suppose Finlay will come while I am there, and we may settle

[1] John Finlay, a young poet of great promise, author of *Wallace, or the Vale of Ellerslie; Historical and Romantic Ballads*, etc. etc., was born in 1782, and died at Moffat in 1810. Wilson wrote an account of his life and writings in *Blackwood* for November 1817.

him comfortably. Wilson says, in speaking of some prize he means to undertake, that he feels the vigour of his mind returning. God grant it! If he will promise to return happy, which I think he may do, from Scotland, his going will be a blessed event; but if he is to come away again in the same miserable uncertainty, it will destroy the little calm he has gained, and repeat the same sufferings with less strength to bear them. I shall see him before he goes."

Soon after this he was seized with a fit of illness, which caused much concern to his affectionate correspondents, Blair and Findlay. He quickly recovered, however; and his brother Andrew, then serving at Chatham, on board H.M.S. "Magicienne," writes to Robert on the 7th of December, "that he had found him in very good health, but in very bad spirits." His own account of the matter in a letter to Findlay, of December 10, 1804, is sufficiently plain, and needs no comment:—

"Though well when Andrew came here, as bad luck would have it, I was taken ill before he left me, but not dangerously, and I am rather better. I believe my complaint is nervous, and mortally affects my spirits. I have a constant beating at my heart, and a wavering of thought resembling a sort of derangement; but I have been bled and feel better.

"This wretched complaint has been brought on by my late attempt to bury in unbridled dissipation the recollection of blasted hopes. But God's will be done."

Between this date and the next letter, there is a gap of ten months. Of what passed in the interval, there

is no memorial beyond the allusions in his letter, from which we gather that he travelled during the summer in the north of England and in Ireland; that a considerable portion of the holidays was spent among the Lakes; and that there and then he seized the opportunity offered of becoming the proprietor of Elleray, one of the loveliest spots in which a poet ever fixed his home. This letter is dated London, October 3, 1805, and is written in a cheerful strain, yet betraying the overhanging of the clouds, which were deepening over his love prospects, though for a brief space breaking into delusive sunshine:[1]—

"LONDON, *October* 3, 1805.

"MY DEAR BOB,—I received your letter in a wonderfully short time after it was written, considering the extensive tour of his Majesty's dominion it had judged it expedient to take before condescending to pay me a visit. It spent the greatest part of the summer in visiting Oxford, London, Scarborough, Harrogate, Edinburgh, and the various post-towns of Westmoreland, Cumberland, and Lancashire. When it finally reached me, its visage was wofully begrimed with dirt, and its sides squeezed into a shape far from epistolary. It truly cut a most ridiculous appearance, and indeed was ashamed of itself, for it made its escape from my possession the day after I first cast salt upon its tail; and as I have never seen it since, I am led to suppose

[1] As he in after life said, "Sometimes, my dear Shepherd, my life from eighteen to twenty-four is an utter blank, like a moonless midnight; at other times, oh! what a refulgent day!" —*Noctes* xxxv.

that it may have once more set out on its travels, in which case you probably will meet with it soon in Glasgow.

"I was not a little provoked to find, that during my solitary rambles in Ireland, you were improving yourself in polite accomplishments among the mountains of Wales. The rapidity with which you travelled, seems to have been astonishing and praiseworthy.

"I do not feel myself in a mood just now to give you any account of my Irish expedition, which afforded me all the possible varieties of pain, and a good many modifications of pleasure. It was prolific in adventure and scrape, and made me acquainted with strange bedfellows. Had you been with me, I am sure we would have enjoyed it more than you could well imagine. I have spent this summer at Scarborough, Harrogate, and the Lakes. The weather has been sufficiently bad to provoke an old sow to commit suicide—a fact which actually took place near Ambleside. The creature cut its throat with a hand-saw.

". . . . I have bought some ground on Windermere Lake, but whether in future years I may live there, I know not. I think that a settled life will never do for me; and I often lament that I did not enter the army or navy, a thing which is now entirely impossible. While I keep moving, life goes on well enough, but whenever I pause, the fever of the soul begins.

"JOHN WILSON."

There is no letter again for a period of six months; and we are left to imagine that the interval was filled

up with alternations of gloom and gaiety, of hard study and hard living. He was giving himself, like the royal preacher, not only "to know wisdom," but to know also "madness and folly." The mention of Margaret is briefer than hitherto, even slightly suggestive of constraint, and one begins to see some shadowing of the truth in that sentence of the Essay on "Streams:"—"For two years of absence and of distance brought a strange, dim, misty haze over the fires—supposed unquenchable—of our hearts; then came suspicion, distrust, wrathful jealousy, and stone-eyed despair!" It had not come to that yet, for, before the curtain closes on this love-drama, there is one glimpse of ecstatic happiness, followed only by deeper gloom and unbroken silence.

The next letter is addressed to Findlay, and dated

"OXFORD, *April* 13, 1806.

"MY DEAREST ROBERT,—If I have not answered your letter so soon as perhaps I should have done, it was neither from being indifferent to the very agreeable contents of it, nor careless of that happiness which I see awaits you in life, and which no soul on earth better deserves than you. Most genuine satisfaction it did give me to hear of the kindness which your father's memory has procured you.

"In your case it may justly be said that a good man's righteousness is an inheritance to his children. That happiness, prosperity, and peace may ever attend you, is a wish I need not express to one who knows me so well as you do. As to myself, I have not a very great

deal to say. I am going on pretty much in the old way, sometimes unhappy enough, God knows! and at other times tolerably comfortable.

"I believe that I live rather too hard, and I have formed a very determined resolution to change my ways; but it is one thing to make a resolution, and another to keep it. I have certainly led a dissipated life for some time, but,

> 'Wine, they say, drives off despair,
> And bids even hope remain,
> And that is sure a reason fair
> To fill my glass again.'

"I expected to have heard something from D., informing me of your intention relative to our summer tour to the lakes. I wrote him how I was situated at present; but I would like to hear how your intentions are, as I might perhaps accommodate myself in a great measure to them. I am uncertain whether I shall be in Scotland again for some years. If you could meet me at the lakes in July early, even without our other friends, I think we might pass the time most happily. But I expect to hear from you very soon at great length. By the bye, I know not what excuse to make for not having visited Torrance. If ever you see Margaret, I wish you would tell how happy you know I would have been to see her, but that it could have been only for an hour or two, and that I therefore put off the happiness till I could stay a day or two with her in a few months. Perhaps she may attribute to coldness what arose from the deepness of love. It will give me sincere happiness to hear often and soon from you. Everything

interesting to you will interest me, so omit nothing of that kind.

"Remember me kindly to Finlay and Smith, and to all you love, mother and sisters. Blair is with me, and wishes you well.—Yours ever, JOHN WILSON."

It would appear from the following letter, written from his mother's house in Edinburgh, that the tour to the lakes was changed for one in the Highlands of Scotland, which, during the space of six weeks' time, was agreeably spent by the aforesaid friends:—

"53, QUEEN STREET, EDINBURGH,
*July* 29, 1806.

"MY DEAR BOB,—I have long been conjecturing the reason of your unconjecturable silence. What in the name of wonder are you about? I had a letter from Dunlop, telling me you proposed accompanying us to the Highlands. I hope you will do so. Both Dunlop and myself are good fellows, but we should get d—ly tiresome without a third. I think the best way will be to meet at Stirling. I shall be there on Saturday the 9th, by five o'clock, and whoever arrives first can order dinner for the others. You can let me know of the inn we had best go to. It would be a foolish waste of time for you and Dunlop to come to Edinburgh, except in the case of going to St. Andrews, which I strongly give my vote against.—I am thine ever, JOHN WILSON."

There are no more letters dated from Oxford or elsewhere for some months. The next to which we come is,

however, of deep interest. It is from Blair to Findlay, of date March 19, 1807, giving an account of Wilson's examination for his Bachelor Degree :—

"MY DEAR ROBERT,—About a fortnight ago, Wilson wrote to me to desire I would go to him immediately, and he would tell me what had happened with regard to *her*. I went, of course, and found him very much distressed, with a degree of anxiety that I could not have conceived, about his examination, which was to come on in a few days. If his mind had had its former strength, this, he said, would not have affected him, but after what had happened to him, he had no strength left. The terror of this examination preyed so on his mind, that for ten days before I saw him he had scarcely slept any night more than an hour or two. I wish to know from you, what it is that has happened in Scotland, that has shaken his mind to this degree—for he has not spoken a word on the subject to me—and I could not begin to speak of it, after having seen, as I have seen, the state into which it threw him, to give way to his feelings. I could not begin a conversation that was to terminate in such bursts of anguish as I have witnessed.

"Write to me as soon as you can to tell me this, though you should have time to write nothing more. When he walked from this college to the schools, he went along in full conviction that he was to be plucked. His examination was, as might naturally be expected, the most illustrious within the memory of man. Sotheby was there, and declared it was worth coming from London to hear him translate a Greek chorus. I was exceed-

ingly pleased with Shepherd, his examiner, who seemed highly delighted at having got hold of him, and took much pains to show him off. Indeed he is given to show people off; and those who know little are said not to relish the operation, so that his name is a name of terror, but nothing could be luckier for John than his strict, close style of examination.

"The mere riddance of that burden, which had sat so long on his thoughts, was enough to make him dance; but he was also elated with success and applause, and was in very high spirits after it. I left him last night."

The examination was truly, to use his private tutor's expression, a "glorious" one. "*It marked the scholar*," is the measured but emphatic phrase of the formidable Mr. Shepherd, in referring to it. "I can never forget," said another of the examiners, the Rev. Richard Dixon, Fellow and Tutor of Queen's, "the very splendid examination which you passed in this University; an examination which afforded the strongest proofs of very great application, and genius, and scholarship, and which produced such an impression on the minds of the Examiners, as to call forth (a distinction very rarely conferred) the public expression of our approbation and thanks.[1]

[1] From subsequent testimonies regarding his Oxford studies and reputation, a few may in this place be inserted. The Rev. Benjamin Cheese, who was his private tutor during the last two years of his University course, thus referred to that period:—"Among all my pupils I never met with one who read with greater zest the sublime pages of the Greek tragedians, or penetrated with the same rapid acuteness into the abstruse difficulties of Aristotle. The analyses which you then made for me of the Ethics, Rhetoric, and Poetics of that great philosopher, I still preserve as

Little did these Examiners and admiring friends imagine with what feelings John Wilson had walked into the schools that morning, "in the full conviction that he was to be plucked." Little did they know, as they propounded difficulties in Greek choruses and the *Ethics*, of the more oppressing thought that had made the last ten nights so dreadful,—"what had happened with regard to *her!*" Compared with that, what to him was Hecuba, or Antigone either? On this subject, let it be noted, he did not open his lips to the beloved friend whom he had expressly summoned, that he

a memorial of you. I never refer to them without regretting that your Oxford examination for a degree took place previously to the introduction of the new system, under which men are now arranged in distinct classes, according to their real merits, as I am well assured that the public appearance which you *then* made (for I was myself present on the glorious occasion) would *now* fully entitle you to the very highest honours which our University can bestow."

"He was always considered by me," writes the Rev. William Russell, Fellow of Magdalen College, "and by other members of the College in which we were educated, to be a man of strong powers of mind, great industry and zeal for learning, and no ordinary degree of taste. His College exercises and compositions invariably displayed much genius and skill in argument; and the small poem on Sculpture, Architecture, and Painting, which gained the University Prize, given by the late Sir Roger Newdigate, on the first year of its establishment, was esteemed on all hands to be a superior specimen of talent. And I can truly say, that the reputation he acquired during his residence in Oxford, not only in our own Society, but in the University at large, remains fresh amongst us, though many years have elapsed since he left us, and many others of high talent have arisen during that period to attract our admiration."

The venerable President of his College, Dr. Routh, bore similar testimony:—"I can safely say, that amongst the non-foundationers of Magdalen College, who are generally about twelve in number, I do not recollect any one during my long residence in it, who has had an equal share of reputation with yourself for great natural abilities, united with extensive literary acquirements. I remember the satisfaction I generally

might tell him "what had happened." And that sympathizing friend, who had hastened to hear and to console, religiously held his peace, and "could not begin to speak of it, after having seen the state into which it threw him;" and had to go elsewhere for information. It is altogether a singular exhibition of character on both sides, reminding one of those old Easterns who sat seven days speechless before their friend, "for they saw that his grief was very great."

What it was that had "happened with regard to *her*," to bring him to this state of wretchedness, may

felt at the appearance you made at the examinations in classical authors, held thrice in the year within the College, and have often perused with delight that elegant composition which obtained a University prize, and whose only fault seemed to be that it was too short."

The Rev. Charles Thorp, formerly a Fellow of University College, Oxford, says, "Your character and talents were known to me when I was a tutor at Oxford, and yourself a student there, before I had the pleasure of a personal acquaintance with you; an acquaintance I sought and prized, and have always wished to improve." "Those who, like myself," says Archdeacon Burney, "loved and admired you at Oxford, would, I am sure, feel pleasure in bearing a just testimony to your acuteness of discrimination, your keen spirit of inquiry, your extended reading, your copiousness in illustration, which even then rendered you eminent above your fellows." "The course of studies at Oxford," says Sir Charles E. Grey (formerly of Oriel College, Oxford, afterwards Chief-Justice of Bengal), "had shortly before been placed upon a new and excellent footing; and I shall always consider it a fortunate incident in my life that I fell on that period when all members of the University were full of zeal for the new improvements, and were engaging in the course that was opened for them with an ardour which it was not to be hoped could be sustained for many years. With what eagerness and assiduity were the writings of the moral philosophers, orators, historians, and tragedians of Greece and Rome read and almost learned by heart. The distinguished examination which you passed, the prize which you obtained, and the general reputation which you acquired, are proofs that you were amongst the most successful students of the day."

be gathered from his own letter, apparently written about the same time, to Findlay :—

"*October* 19, 1807.

"MY DEAREST ROBERT,—I have often wished to write to you, but to such an intimate friend as you I know not how to speak. There is not one ray of hope that I shall ever be able to make my mother listen for a moment to the subject nearest my heart. I know her violent feelings too well; I even know this, that if I were to acquaint her with my love for Margaret, we never could again be on the footing of mother and son.

"All this may be to you inexplicable; that I cannot help; that it is the fact, I know to my sorrow. Blair is with me, and unless he had been so, I must have died. Before my examination, my state of mind got dreadful. He sat up several nights with me, and at last I was examined and got my degree 'cum laude,' a matter certainly of indifference to me. I do not wish you to come to London if you could, for I shall not be there. The only reason I have for writing is to show you how perfectly I am your friend, and ever will be so, for by your last I saw my silence had surprised you. If I feel more at home to-morrow, I will write you again, but unless I saw yourself I could not tell you my feelings and future plans of existence, which must be joyless and unendeared.—Thine eternally,

"J. WILSON."

"OXFORD, 1807.

"MY DEAR BOB,—I received your letter this morning, and it has confirmed me in what I feared, that I have

written some infernal thing or another to Margaret: the truth is, that about the time I wrote her I was in a curious way, as indeed I am now, from having taken laudanum, not exactly with a view to annihilation, but spirits. That blessed beverage played the devil with my intellects, and absolutely destroyed my capacity of distinguishing right from wrong, or what was serious from ludicrous. At times I was in the same state as if I were as drunk as Chloe; and at others, sober, sad, and sunk in despair and misery. If this be any excuse to you for what I may have said, of which I do not recollect one word, you can employ it as such; if not, you are a severer judge than I have ever yet found you. As to saying anything savage to Margaret, I scarcely think that possible, for why should even a madman do that? I have since written her, and hope whatever offences I have committed, I have her forgiveness. If you regard my soul, go again to her, and try to explain my conduct as best you can, for I am unable to justify myself, my thoughts are so dreadful when I wish to write to her. This love of mine has been a fine thing; first kept me many years in misery, and now perhaps alienated from me the friendship and good opinion of those I love and regard; however, I need not expatiate much on that. As to the other parts of your letter, I can say nothing to them. Do you really imagine that I would easily give up the prospect of eternal felicity? I have corresponded with —— often upon the subject, and know too well how it is. I shall not injure them so far as to let you know all they have said on the subject; the enclosed letter may give you some faint idea of it, as it

is the mildest and most fitted to inspire hope of them all. J. W."

We are now approaching the close of this tender episode. That summer the lovers met, and the obstructing clouds for a brief space clear away in the light of mutual confidence and utter joy. But the obstacles remain nevertheless; and as soon as he is left alone he becomes a prey to the most distracting fears and perplexities. Thus he writes to his dear Robert from "Bowness," some time, as I conjecture, in the autumn of 1807:—

"MY DEAREST ROBERT,—I have often said that I would write you a long letter, and as often have I tried it; but such a crowd of feelings of all different kinds comes across my heart, that I sit for hours with a paper before me, and never write a single word. Indeed, even if we were together, I know not if I could say much to you, for with me all is strange and inextricable perplexity. I love, and am beloved to distraction, and often the gleams of hope illumine the path of futurity with a glory hardly to be looked at; while, again, extravagance of love seems only extravagance of folly, and excess of fondness excess of despair. I am betimes the most miserable and the happiest of created beings. So far I am better than during former years, when I had no hope, no wish to live. Now, indeed, my sadness almost wholly regards Margaret. For myself, I have been inured to wretchedness, and though, in some respects, or as far as it made me a man of worse conduct than of principles, I have yielded to the common effect

of misery, in future, I could look forward to dreary solitude of spirit with some tolerable degree of composure. But for her, whose peace is far dearer to me than my own, I have many dreadful anticipations. Should our union be rendered impracticable, and Miss W. to die, an event which, I trust in God, is far, far distant, God only knows what would become of her."

In anticipation of these obstacles being removed, he turns his thoughts to home, and addresses a beautiful short poem ("My Cottage") to Margaret. His spirit then did

> "Travel like a summer sun,
> Itself all glory, and its path all joy;"[1]

but this bright change was of brief duration. The curious would doubtless desire to know something more of why this "love never found its earthly close," while others will rest satisfied with such conclusions as may be drawn from the following expressions met with in letters addressed to his dear friend, Robert Findlay: "I feel myself in a great measure an alien in my own family, and all this is the consequence of that my most unfortunate attachment." And once more, in allusion to this subject, he says: "I know enough now to know that my mother would die if this happened."

The following fragment will terminate this story:

"I have made up my mind not to visit Torrance at present, in which case I must not come to Glasgow. This resolution, I hope, is right. It has been made after many an hour of (painful) reflection. This I know, that

[1] *Miscellaneous Poems*, vol. ii.

were I to go, I could not bear to look on my mother's face, a feeling which must not be mine. Enclosed is a letter to Margaret. If you could take it yourself, and see how it is received, it would please me much; yet there may be people there, in which case that would be useless.

"Thine till death in joy or sorrow,

"Bowness, *December 22.*"

We know not how they parted, but this we may imagine, that "they caught up the whole of love, and uttered it," and bade adieu for ever.

## CHAPTER V.

### LIFE AT ELLERAY.

### 1807–11.

In 1807, John Wilson concluded his University career, the brilliancy of which, for many years, gave his name a prestige worthy of long remembrance within the academic walls of Oxford. He loved the beautiful fields of England, and with all the world before him where to choose a place of rest, he turned his steps from his Alma Mater, to that lovely land where cluster the fair lakes of Cumberland and Westmoreland. Having selected a home on the banks of Windermere, we find him there in the prime of youth, with that keen nature of his alternating between light and shade, and every possible humour attendant on the impulses of an ardent heart, yet uneasy with a burden which there was none other to share. Possibly the restless life he led began in a hope of self-forgetfulness; yet there was at the same time, in the conscious possession of so much bodily strength, and that unceasing activity of spirit, an irrepressible desire to exercise every faculty. To many his life in Westmoreland may appear to have been one of idleness, but not to those who, with a kindly discernment of human nature, see the advantages which varied experience gives to a strong mind.

We now follow him to Elleray. For a description of this beautiful spot I gladly avail myself of the striking description of Mr. De Quincey:[1]—

"With the usual latitude of language in such cases I say *on* Windermere; but in fact this charming estate lies far above the lake; and one of the most interesting of its domestic features is the foreground of the rich landscape which connects, by the most gentle scale of declivities, this almost aërial altitude [as, for *habitable* ground, it really is] with the sylvan margin of the deep water which rolls a mile and a half below. When I say a mile and a half, you will understand me to compute the descent according to the undulations of the ground; because else the perpendicular elevation above the level of the lake cannot be above one-half of that extent. Seated on such an eminence, but yet surrounded by foregrounds of such quiet beauty, and settling downwards towards the lake by such tranquil steps as to take away every feeling of precipitous or dangerous elevation, Elleray possesses a double character of beauty rarely found in connexion; and yet each, by singular good-fortune, in this case, absolute and unrivalled in its kind. Within a bowshot of each other may be found stations of the deepest seclusion, fenced in by verdurous walls of insuperable forest heights, and presenting a limited scene of beauty — deep, solemn, noiseless, severely sequestered—and other stations of a magnificence so gorgeous as few estates in this island can boast, and of those few perhaps none in such close

[1] Letter addressed to the *Edinburgh Literary Gazette*, 1829, a forgotten newspaper of which there were only two vols. published.

connexion with a dwelling-house. Stepping out from the very windows of the drawing-room, you find yourself on a terrace which gives you the feeling of a 'specular height,' such as you might expect on Ararat, or might appropriately conceive on 'Athos seen from Samothrace.' The whole course of a noble lake, about eleven miles long, lies subject to your view, with many of its islands, and its two opposite shores so different in character—the one stern, precipitous, and gloomy; the other (and luckily the hither one) by the mere bounty of nature and of accident—by the happy disposition of the ground originally, and by the fortunate equilibrium between the sylvan tracks, meandering irregularly through the whole district, and the proportion left to verdant fields and meadows, wearing the character of the richest park scenery; except indeed that this character is here and there a little modified by a quiet hedge-row, or the stealing smoke which betrays the embowered cottage of a labourer. But the sublime, peculiar, and not-to-be-forgotten feature of the scene is the great system of mountains which unite about five miles off at the head of the lake to lock in and enclose this noble landscape. The several ranges of mountains which stand at various distances within six or seven miles of the little town of Ambleside, all separately various in their forms, and all eminently picturesque, when seen from Elleray, appear to blend and group as parts of one connected whole; and, when their usual drapery of clouds happens to take a fortunate arrangement, and the sunlights are properly broken and thrown from the most suitable quarter of the heavens, I cannot recollect any spectacle

in England or Wales, of the many hundreds I have seen, bearing a local, if not a national reputation for magnificence of prospect, which so much dilates the heart with a sense of power and aërial sublimity as this terrace-view from Elleray."

At the time when my father purchased Elleray, there was no suitable dwelling-house on the estate. A rustic cottage indeed there was, which, with the addition of a

The Cottage at Elleray.

drawing-room thrown out at one end, was made capable for many a year to come of meeting the hospitable system of life adopted by its owner. It was built of common stone, but it might have been marble for aught that the eye could tell. Pretty French windows opened to the ground, and were the only uncovered portion of

it; all else was a profusion of jessamine, clematis, and honeysuckle. A trellised entrance clustering with wild roses, led to the chief part of the dwelling. Beyond the dining-room windows was the entrance to the kitchen and other parts of the house, only differing from the first door in being made of the dark blue slate of the country, and unadorned by roses. The bedroom windows to the front, peeped out from their natural festoons unshaded by other curtains, while the cottage was protected by a fine old sycamore-tree that, standing on a gentle eminence, sent its spreading branches and umbrageous foliage far over the roof, just leaving room enough for the quaint, picturesque chimneys to send their curling smoke into the air.[1] The little cottage lay beneath the shelter of a well-wooded hill, that gave a look of delightful retirement and comfort to its situation; a poet's home it might well be called. The lofty peaks of the Langdale Pikes ever greeted the eye, in the dark shadows of evening or glittering beneath a noon-day sun; and Windermere as seen from Elleray was seen best—every point and bay, island and cove, lay there unveiled. Perhaps in the clearing away of mist in early morning the scene was most refreshing, as bit by

[1] Of this sycamore he often spoke. "Never in this well-wooded world," soliloquized the poet, "not even in the days of the Druids, could there have been such another tree! It would be easier to suppose two Shaksperes. Yet I have heard people say it is far from being a large tree. A small one it cannot be, with a house in its shadow—an unawakened house that looks as if it were dreaming. True, 'tis but a cottage, a Westmoreland cottage. But then it has several roofs shelving away there in the lustre of loveliest lichens; each roof with its own assortment of doves and pigeons preening their pinions in the morning pleasance. Oh, sweetest and shadiest of all sycamores, we love thee beyond all other trees!"

bit a dewy green cluster of trees appears, and then a gleam of water, with some captive cloud deep set in its light, a mountain base, or far-off pasture, the well-defined colours of rich middle-distance creating impatience for a perfect picture; when all at once the obscuring vapours passed away, and the whole landscape was revealed.

Although this picturesque cottage remained the dwelling-house till 1825, my father began to build in the year 1808 a mansion of more elegant proportions, after plans of his own. We may gather some idea of what these plans were by referring to his ideal description of Buchanan Lodge. The whole tenement was to be upon the ground flat. "I abhor stairs," said he, "and there can be no peace in any mansion where heavy footsteps may be heard over head. Suppose three sides of a square. You approach the front by a fine serpentine avenue, and enter slap-bang through a wide glass door into a green-house, a conservatory of everything rich and rare in the world of flowers. Folding-doors are drawn noiselessly into the walls as if by magic, and lo! drawing-room and dining-room stretching east and west in dim and distant perspective. Another side of the square contains kitchen, servants' rooms, etc.; and the third side my study and bedrooms, all still, silent, composed, standing obscure, unseen, unapproachable, holy! The fourth side of the square is not; shrubs and trees and a productive garden shut me in from behind, while a ring fence enclosing about five acres, just sufficient for my nag and cow, form a magical circle into which nothing vile or profane can intrude."

The new house at Elleray, of which this was an ideal description, was, as Mr. De Quincey remarked, a silent commentary on its master's state of mind, and an exemplification of his character. The plan when completed, which in appearance had been extravagant, turned out in reality to have been calculated with the coolest judgment and nicest foresight of domestic needs.

In this beautiful retirement the young poet was now at liberty to enjoy all the varied delights of poetic meditation, of congenial society, and of those endless out-door recreations which constituted no small part of his life. Soon did his presence become identified with every nook and corner of that lake region. In the mountain pass, by the lonely stream, on the waters of the lake, by night and by day, in the houses of the rich and the poor, he came to be recognised as a familiar and welcome presence. Often would the early morning find him watching the rising mist, until the whole landscape lay clear before his enraptured eyes, and the fresh beauty of the hour invited him to a long day's ramble into the heart of the valley. Though much given, as of old, to solitary wanderings, he did not neglect to cultivate the society of the remarkable men whom he found in that district, when he took up his residence at Elleray,—Wordsworth at Rydal, Southey and Coleridge at Keswick, Charles Lloyd at Brathay, Bishop Watson at Calgarth, the Rev. Mr. Fleming at Rayrig, and other friends of lesser note, but not less pleasant memory, in and around Ambleside.

The first meeting with Wordsworth did not take place till the year 1807, the poet and his family having lived

the greater part of that year at Colerton, returning to Grasmere in the spring of 1808. At his house there, towards the latter end of that year, Wilson met De Quincey. Strange to say, they had, when at Oxford, remained unknown to each other; but here, attracted by the same influence, a mutual friendship was not long in being formed, which endured—independent of years of separation and many caprices of fortune—till death divided them. The graces of nature with which De Quincey was endowed fascinated my father, as they did every mind that came within the sphere of his extraordinary power in the days of his mental vigour, ere that sad destiny—for so it may be called—overtook him, which the brightness and strength of his intellect had no power to avert. The first impressions of the "Opium Eater" must be given in his own graphic words:[1]—"I remember the whole scene as circumstantially as if it belonged to but yesterday. In the vale of Grasmere—that peerless little vale, which you and Gray the poet and so many others have joined in admiring as the very Eden of English beauty, peace, and pastoral solitude—you may possibly recall, even from that flying glimpse you had of it, a modern house called Allanbank, standing under a low screen of woody rocks which descend from the hill of Silver How, on the western side of the lake. This house had been then recently built by a worthy merchant of Liverpool; but for some reason of no importance to you and me, not being immediately wanted for the family of the owner, had been let for a term of three years to Mr. Wordsworth. At the time

1 Disinterred from the columns of the *Edinburgh Literary Gazette*.

I speak of, both Mr. Coleridge and myself were on a visit to Mr. Wordsworth; and one room on the ground-floor, designed for a breakfasting-room, which commands a sublime view of the three mountains — Fairfield, Arthur's Chair, and Seat Sandal (the first of them within about 400 feet of the highest mountains in Great Britain)—was then occupied by Mr. Coleridge as a study. On this particular day, the sun having only just set, it naturally happened that Mr. Coleridge—whose nightly vigils were long—had not yet come down to breakfast; meantime, and until the epoch of the Coleridgian breakfast should arrive, his study was lawfully disposable to profaner uses. Here, therefore, it was, that, opening the door hastily in quest of a book, I found seated, and in earnest conversation, two gentlemen: one of them my host, Mr. Wordsworth, at that time about thirty-seven or thirty-eight years old; the other was a younger man by good sixteen or seventeen years, in a sailor's dress, manifestly in robust health, *fervidus juventa*, and wearing upon his countenance a powerful expression of ardour and animated intelligence, mixed with much good nature. '*Mr. Wilson of Elleray*'—delivered as the formula of introduction, in the deep tones of Mr. Wordsworth—at once banished the momentary surprise I felt on finding an unknown stranger where I had expected nobody, and substituted a surprise of another kind: I now well understood who it was that I saw; and there was no wonder in his being at Allanbank, Elleray standing within nine miles; but (as usually happens in such cases), I felt a shock of surprise on seeing a person so

little corresponding to the one I had half unconsciously prefigured. . . . . Figure to yourself, then, a tall man, about six feet high, within half an inch or so, built with tolerable appearance of strength; but at the date of my description (that is, in the very spring-tide and blossom of youth), wearing, for the predominant character of his person, lightness and agility, or (in our Westmoreland phrase) *lishness;* he seemed framed with an express view to gymnastic exercises of every sort. . . . Viewed, therefore, by an eye learned in gymnastic proportions, Mr. Wilson presented a somewhat striking figure; and by some people he was pronounced with emphasis a fine-looking young man; but others, who less understood, or less valued these advantages, spoke of him as nothing extraordinary. Still greater division of voices I have heard on his pretensions to be thought handsome. In my opinion, and most certainly in his own, these pretensions were but slender. His complexion was too florid; hair of a hue quite unsuited to that complexion; eyes not good, having no apparent depth, but seeming mere surfaces; and, in fine, no one feature that could be called fine, except the lower region of his face, mouth, chin, and the parts adjacent, which were then (and perhaps are now) truly elegant and Ciceronian. Ask in one of your public libraries for that little quarto edition of the Rhetorical Works of Cicero, edited by Schutz (the same who edited Æschylus), and you will there see (as a frontispiece to the first volume), a reduced whole-length of Cicero from the antique; which in the mouth and chin, and indeed generally, if I do not greatly forget, will give you a lively

representation of the contour and expression of Professor Wilson's face. Taken as a whole, though not handsome (as I have already said), when viewed in a quiescent state, the head and countenance are massy, dignified, and expressive of tranquil sagacity. . . . Note, however, that of all this array of personal features, as I have here described them, I then saw nothing at all, my attention being altogether occupied with Mr. Wilson's conversation and demeanour, which were in the highest degree agreeable; the points which chiefly struck me being the humility and gravity with which he spoke of himself, his large expansion of heart, and a certain air of noble frankness which overspread everything he said; he seemed to have an intense enjoyment of life; indeed, being young, rich, healthy, and full of intellectual activity, it could not be very wonderful that he should feel happy and pleased with himself and others; but it was somewhat unusual to find that so rare an assemblage of endowments had communicated no tinge of arrogance to his manner, or at all disturbed the general temperance of his mind."

Many were the pleasant days spent by these friends together; many the joyous excursions among the hills and valleys of the lake country. One memorable gathering is still remembered in the lone places of the mountains, and spoken of to the stranger wandering there. One lovely summer day, in the year 1809, the solitudes of Eskdale were invaded by what seemed a little army of anglers. It consisted of thirty-two persons, ten of whom were servants brought to look after the tents and

baggage necessary for a week's sojourn in the mountains.' This camp with its furniture was carried by twelve ponies. Among the gentlemen of the party were Wilson, Wordsworth, De Quincey, Alexander Blair, two Messrs. Astley, Humphries, and some others whose names have escaped notice. After passing through Eskdale, and that solemn tract of country which opens upon Wastwater, they there pitched their tent, and roaming far and near from that point, each took his own way till evening hours assembled them together.

The beauty of the scenes through which they rambled, the fine weather, and, above all, that geniality of taste and disposition which had brought them together, made the occasion one of unforgotten satisfaction. It formed the theme of one of Wilson's most beautiful minor poems, entitled the "Anglers' Tent," which was written soon after at Elleray, where Wordsworth was then living. One morning a great discussion took place between the poets about a verse Wilson had some difficulty in arranging. At last, after much trying and questioning, it was made out between them:—

> "The placid lake that rested far below
> Softly embosoming another sky,
> Still as we gazed assumed a lovelier glow,
> And seemed to send us looks of amity."

The troublesome line was—

> "Softly embosoming another sky."

In a letter I received from Dr. Blair, he says:—"'The Friend' was going on at that time—Coleridge living at Wordsworth's—Wordsworth making, and read-

ing to us as he made them, the 'Sonnets to the Tyrolese,' first given in 'The Friend;' and from Elleray that winter went 'Mathetes.'[1] I remember that De Quincey was with us at the time. He may have given some suggestions besides, but we certainly owed to him our signature."

Of my father's poetic compositions during these years I shall speak presently. I find in one of his common-place books some unpublished verses, which may, however, be inserted here, if only in illustration of what at this time was a frequent practice of his, and continued to be indulged in for many years of his after life, viz., the habit of walking in solitude during the hours of night. In spite of his generally even flow of good spirits, and his lively enjoyment of social pleasures, it seemed as if in the depths of his heart he craved some influence more soothing and elevating than even the most congenial companionship could afford. In these silent hours, whether pacing among the hills, or resting in contemplation of the glories of the earth and sky, the solemnity of feeling which was thus induced found natural expression in words of religious adoration. At the head of the lake stood the mansion of Brathay, the residence of John Harden, Esq. There on his way for a midnight ramble, did he often gain admittance, and, for some time, hold converse with his friend, before taking his solitary way to the mountains, within the deep shadows of which he would wander for hours, engaged in what he appropriately calls

[1] A letter on Education, the joint composition of Wilson and Blair, addressed to the editor of "The Friend."

"MIDNIGHT ADORATION.

"Beneath the full-orb'd moon, that bathed in light
The mellow'd verdure of Helvellyn's steep,
My spirit teeming with creations bright,
I walked like one who wanders in his sleep!

"The glittering stillness of the starry sky
Shone in my heart as in the waveless sea;
And rising up in kindred majesty,
I felt my soul from earthly fetters free!

"Joy filled my being like a gentle flood;
I felt as living without pulse or breath
Eternity seem'd o'er my heart to brood,
And as a faded dream, I thought of death.

"Through the hush'd air awoke mysterious awe.
God cheer'd my loneliness with holy mirth
And in this blended mood I clearly saw
The moving spirit that pervades the earth.

"While adoration blessed my inward sense
I felt how beautiful this world could be,
When clothed with gleams of high intelligence
Born of the mountain's still sublimity.

"I sunk in silent worship on my knees,
While night's unnumber'd planets roll'd afar;
Blest moment for a contrite heart to seize—
Forgiving love shone forth in every star!

"The mighty moon my pensive soul subdued
With sorrow, tranquil as her cloudless ray,
Mellowing the transport of her loftiest mood
With conscious glimmerings of immortal day.

"I felt with pain that life's perturbèd wave
Had dimm'd the blaze to sinless spirits given
But saw with joy, reposing on the grave,
The seraph Hope that points the way to heaven.

"The waveless clouds that hung amid the light,
By Mercy's hand with braided glory wove,
Seem'd, in their boundless mansions, to my sight
Like guardian spirits o'er the land they love.

"My heart lay pillowed on their wings of snow,
Drinking the calm that slept on every fold,
Till memory of the life she led below
Seem'd like a tragic tale to pity told.

"When visions from the distant world arose—
How fair the gleams from memory's mystic urn
How did my soul, 'mid Nature's blest repose,
To the soft bosom of affection turn!

"Then sinless grew my hopes, my wishes pure,
Breeding a seraph loftiness of soul;
Though free from pride, I felt of heaven secure
A step, a moment from the eternal goal!

"Those fearful doubts that strike the living blood,
Those dreams that sink the heart, we know not why,
Were changed to joy by this mysterious mood,
Sprung from the presence of Eternity.

"I saw, returning to its fount sublime,
The flood of being that from Nature flowed;
And then, displaying at the death of time,
The essence and the lineaments of God!

"Thus pass'd the midnight hour, till from the wave
The orient sun flamed slowly up the sky;
Such a blest spirit found illumined gaze,
And seem'd to realize my vision high."

Another extract from the same book contains a touching record of the associations connected with a summer day's ramble with Wordsworth upon the slopes of Helvellyn. It appears to be an outline in prose of what was meant to form the subject of a poem, to be entitled RED TARN, and is as follows:—

"Address to the reader about the reports he may have heard about the beauty and sublimity of the lakes.

"He probably has resolved to go up to Helvellyn to admire the sublimity of that mountain: this is right. Now beneath that mountain there is a little tarn which

you will see. I will tell you something about that tarn. Two persons were sitting silent and alone beside that tarn, looking steadfastly on the water, and lost in thought. These were two brothers who dearly loved each other, and had done so from earliest youth to manhood.[1] The one was a man of genius and a poet, who lived among these mountains enjoying his own thoughts. The other younger by a few years, and had gone to sea, but had lately returned to see his brother, and resolved to live with him. His brother accompanied him across the hills on his way to join his ship for the last time, and here they sat, about to part. They had talked over their future plans of happiness when they were again to meet, and of their simple sports. As their last act, they agreed to lay the foundation-stone of a little fishing-hut, and this they did with tears.

"They parted there, in that dim and solemn place, and recommended each other to God's eternal care.

"The one brother was drowned at sea. After the first agony was over, the recollection of that parting flashed upon the mind of the survivor; he at last found courage to go there, and in a state of blindness and desolation sat down upon the very stone. At last he opened his eyes, the tarn smiling with light; the raven croaking as before when they parted; all the crags seem the same; the sheep are in the same figures browsing before them; he almost expects to find his brother at his side; he then thinks of shipwreck and agony of all kinds.

"Next time he sits calmly and thinks upon it all; he even now loves the spot, and can talk of it.

1 Wordsworth and a brother who was afterwards drowned.

" I one sweet summer day went along with him and heard the melancholy tale.

" Then, whoever goes to that sublime solitude muse with holy feelings, and with the wildness of nature join human sympathies."

But there were other pursuits besides poetry that formed a part of my father's life at Elleray too prominent and characteristic to be passed unnoticed. Of these his various commonplace books contain not a few memoranda, strangely intermixed with matters of a graver or more sentimental kind. Among the other amusements with which he diversified life in the country, boating was one of the principal. As may be supposed, this was a favourite diversion in the lake country, and Wilson's taste for it was cultivated with a zeal that, in fact, became a passion. The result was a degree of skill and hardihood beyond that of most amateurs. He had a small fleet on Windermere, the expense of maintaining which was undoubtedly very considerable.[1] Of the numerous boatmen required to man these vessels there was one whose name became at Elleray familiar as a household word—the faithful Billy Balmer. Billy was the neatest and best rower on Windermere, and knew that beauteous water from head to foot, in all her humours, from sunrise to nightfall,

[1] Among the miscellaneous jottings, from which I have been extracting above, I find such items as the following :—" Endeavour, and masts and sails, £160, ballast, £15—£175 ;" " Eliza, £30 ;" " Endeavour, £150 ;" " Palafox, £20 ;" " Jane, £180 ;" " additional Endeavour, £25 ;" " Clyde, Billy, Snail, £10." The names of his sailing vessels were—The Endeavour, The Eliza, The Palafox, The Roscoe, The Clyde, The Jane, The Billy, besides a fine ten-oared Oxford barge, called Nil Timeo.

and even later. There was not a more skilful boatman, or a steadier steersman on the lake, and he was about the best judge of a pretty craft and good sailing to be found. He could sing a sailor's song, had an undeniable love of fun, understood humour, and felt the difference of wit. No one knew how to tell a story better, and with a due unction of excusable exaggeration combined with reality; and in every tale of Billy his master was invariably the hero. He was a little man, weather-beaten in complexion, and much marked from smallpox. His hair was of a light sandy colour; his eyes blue and kindly in expression, as was also his smile; his gait, rather doglike, not quite straight ahead, but, like that honest animal, he was sure-footed, and quick in getting over the ground. That pleasant broad Westmoreland dialect of his, too, gave peculiar character to his voice; and there is a grateful remembrance of the hearty grasp of his little, hard, horny hand when it greeted welcome, or bade adieu, while the whole picture of the man, in his blue dress, sailor fashion, stands distinctly before me, either as he steered the "Endeavour" or mowed the grass on the lawn at Elleray.[1]

One or two anecdotes still linger about the country, showing how recklessly Wilson could expose himself at all hours to the chances of the weather. Cold, snow,

[1] "Seldom rose we," said my father in after years, "from our delightful dormitory, till about twelve o'clock, we heard the south breeze come pushing up from the sea. Then Billy used to tap at our door, with his tarry paw, and whisper, 'Master, Peggs is ready. I have brailed up the foresail; her jigger sits as straight as the Knave of Clubs, and we have ballasted with sand-bags. We's beat the Liverpoolean to-day, Master.' Then I rose."—See also *Works*, vol. vi. p. 7, and vol. ix. p. 248.

wind, and rain were no obstacles; nothing could repress the impulse that drove him forth to seek nature in all her moods. During a stormy December night, when the snow was falling fast, with little or no light in the heavens, he took a fancy to tempt the waters of Windermere, and setting off with the never-failing Billy, they took boat from Miller-ground and steered for Bowness. In a short time all knowledge of the point to which they were bound was lost. The darkness became more dismal every moment; the cold was intolerable. Several hours were spent in this dreary position, poor Billy in despair, expecting every instant would find them at the bottom of the lake, when suddenly the skiff went aground. The oars were not long in being made use of to discover the nature of their disaster, what and where they had struck, when, to their great satisfaction, a landing-place was found. They had been beating about Miller-ground all the time, scarcely a stone's-throw from their starting-place. Billy's account of the story was, "that Master was well-nigh frozen to death, and had icicles a finger-length hanging from his hair and beard." This adventure ended in the toll-keeper on the Ambleside road being knocked up from his slumbers, and their spending the rest of the night with him, seated by a blazing fire, telling stories and drinking ale, a temptation to which Billy had no difficulty in yielding.

These lake escapades were not confined to boating. Riding one day with his friend, Mr. Richard Watson, by the margin of Rydal Lake, my father's horse became restive. Finding that no ordinary process would soothe

the animal, he turned his head to the lake, with the intention of walking gently among the oozy reeds that grew on its banks, when, quite forgetful or heedless that they suddenly sloped to the water, the horse and his rider were in a moment plunged beyond their depth. Having got into deep waters there was nothing for it but to swim through them; and presently he became aware that his friend's horse, true to the lead, was following close behind. Fortunately the lake was not very broad, and their passage across was soon made, though not without some little feeling of apprehension; for his friend Watson could not swim a stroke.

This equestrian performance suggests a story of another kind of diversion in which, according to Mr. De Quincey's account, my father occasionally indulged at Elleray. It is best given in the Opium-Eater's own words:—"Represent to yourself the earliest dawn of a fine summer's morning, time about half-past two o'clock. A young man, anxious for an introduction to Mr. Wilson, and as yet pretty nearly a stranger to the country, has taken up his abode in Grasmere, and has strolled out at this early hour to that rocky and moorish common (called the White Moss) which overhangs the Vale of Rydal, dividing it from Grasmere. Looking southwards in the direction of Rydal, suddenly he becomes aware of a huge beast advancing at a long trot, with the heavy and thundering tread of a hippopotamus, along the public road. The creature is soon arrived within half a mile of his station; and by the grey light of morning is at length made out to be a

bull apparently flying from some unseen enemy in his rear. As yet, however, all is mystery; but suddenly three horsemen double a turn in the road, and come flying into sight with the speed of a hurricane, manifestly in pursuit of the fugitive bull: the bull labours to navigate his huge bulk to the moor, which he reaches, and then pauses, panting and blowing out clouds of smoke from his nostrils, to look back from his station amongst rocks and slippery crags upon his hunters. If he had conceited that the rockiness of the ground had secured his repose, the foolish bull is soon undeceived; the horsemen, scarcely relaxing their speed, charge up the hill, and speedily gaining the rear of the bull, drive him at a gallop over the worst part of that impracticable ground down into the level ground below. At this point of time the stranger perceives by the increasing light of the morning that the hunters are armed with immense spears fourteen feet long. With these the bull is soon dislodged, and scouring down to the plain below, he and the hunters at his tail take to the common at the head of the lake, and all, in the madness of the chase, are soon half engulfed in the swamps of the morass. After plunging together for ten or fifteen minutes, all suddenly regain the *terra firma*, and the bull again makes for the rocks. Up to this moment there had been the silence of ghosts; and the stranger had doubted whether the spectacle were not a pageant of aërial spectres, ghostly huntsmen, ghostly lances, and a ghostly bull. But just at this crisis, a voice (it was the voice of Mr. Wilson) shouted aloud, 'Turn the

villain; turn that villain; or he will take to Cumberland.' The young stranger did the service required of him; the villain was turned and fled southwards; the hunters, lance in rest, rushed after him; all bowed their thanks as they fled past; the fleet cavalcade again took the high road; they doubled the cape which shut them out of sight; and in a moment all had disappeared, and left the quiet valley to its original silence, whilst the young stranger and two grave Westmoreland 'statesmen' (who by this time had come into sight upon some accident or other) stood wondering in silence, and saying to themselves, perhaps,

> 'The earth hath bubbles as the water hath;
> And these are of them!'

"But they were no bubbles; the bull was a substantial bull; and took no harm at all from being turned out occasionally at midnight for a chase of fifteen or eighteen miles. The bull, no doubt, used to wonder at this nightly visitation; and the owner of the bull must sometimes have pondered a little on the draggled state in which the swamps would now and then leave his beast; but no other harm came of it."[1]

His love of animals has already been noticed.[2] Next

[1] Letter in *Edinburgh Literary Gazette*.

[2] Of this there are numberless indications in his works. Birds were his special favourites, but he was a general lover of animals, beasts, birds, and insects. Even that, to most people, unpleasant creature the spider, was interesting to him; and the *Noctes* contain sundry references to his observations on their habits. "I love spiders," he says; "look at the lineal descendant of Arachne; how beautifully she descends from the chair of Christopher North to the lower regions of our earth."—See *Works*, vol. i. 120; vol. ii. 148, 178, 230, 252, 262. Regarding his qualifications as

to his boats, if not claiming an equal share of attention, came his game-cocks; these afforded a favourite pastime while he was at Oxford. As other men keep their studs, and are careful of the pedigree and training of their racers, so did Wilson watch with studious solicitude over the development and reputation of his game birds. The setting down of hens to hatch was registered as duly and gravely as an astronomer notes the transit of the planets; the number of eggs, the day of the month, and sometimes even the hour of the day being carefully specified.[1]

a naturalist, De Quincey writes:—"Perhaps you already know from your countryman Audubon, that the Professor is himself a naturalist, and of original merit; in fact, worth a score of such meagre bookish naturalists as are formed in museums and by second-hand acts of memory; having (like Audubon) built much of his knowledge upon personal observation. Hence he has two great advantages; one, that his knowledge is accurate in a very unusual degree; and another, that this knowledge, having grown up under the inspiration of a real interest and an unaffected love for its objects—commencing, indeed, at an age when no affectation in matters of that nature could exist—has settled upon those facts and circumstances which have a true philosophical value: habits, predominant affections, the direction of instincts, and the compensatory processes where these happen to be thwarted—on all such topics he is learned and full; whilst, on the science of measurements and proportions, applied to dorsal fins and tail-feathers, and on the exact arrangement of colours, etc.—that petty upholstery of nature, on which books are so tedious and elaborate—not uncommonly he is negligent or forgetful."

[1] The following are some specimens from his memoranda:—

"Small Paisley hen set herself with no fewer than nine eggs on Monday, the 6th of July. Black Edinburgh hen was set on Tuesday, the 23d of June, with twelve eggs—middle of the day. Large Paisley hen was set on Wednesday, the 24th of June, with twelve eggs—middle of the day; one egg laid the day after she was set. Red pullet in Josie's barn was set with nine eggs on Thursday, the 2d of July. Sister to the above, was set with five eggs same day, but they had been sat upon a day or two

In one of the MS. books containing the principal portion of *The Isle of Palms*, I find many of these quaint entries in most eccentric juxtaposition to notes of a very different kind.[1] Along with calculations of the number of lines to be allotted to various proposed poems, such as "St. Hubert," "The Manse," "The Ocean Queen," there are elaborate memoranda of the "broods proposed for next spring." "The spangled cock," and "Lord Derby," the "black brass-winged cock, bred from Caradice with the Keswick Grey," the "Red Liverpool hen," the "Paisley hen," large and small, and many other distinguished fowls, take a prominent position in these curious lists. The name of "Lord Derby," in particular, from its frequent occurrence, implies that that high-bred animal, doubtless of the Knowsley stock, was one of the prime favourites of the establishment. The phraseology and figures in

before. Small black muffled hen set herself with about eight eggs on Monday night, or Tuesday morning, 7th July."

1 Side by side with those beautiful lines beginning—

"Oh, Fairy Child! what can I wish for thee?
Like a perennial flow'ret may'st thou be,
That spends its life in beauty and in bliss;
Soft on thee fall the breath of time,
And still retain in heavenly clime
The bloom that charms in this."—

is ranged the following "List of Cocks for a main with W. and T.," of which a specimen may suffice:—

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | A heavy cock from Dobinson, | £5 | 8 | 0 |
| 2. | Do. from Keene, | 5 | 8 | 0 |
| 3. | Do. do. | 5 | 8 | 0 |
| 4. | Piled cock, Oldfield, | 5 | 2 | 0 |

"Lord Derby" comes in as No. 13, £4, 10s., and the total makes up 22 birds. Of these 13 are to be chosen for the main, and perhaps two byes. J. W."

these memoranda are sometimes altogether unintelligible to the uninitiated.

Of the many fields of fame on which "Lord Derby," "Caradice," and their fellows must have distinguished themselves, there is but one brief record. It is given by one of a party present (James Newby), who recollects "a main of cocks being fought in the drawing-room at Elleray, before the flooring was laid down, and its being covered with sods for this occasion. The rival competitors were Mr. Wilson and Mr. Richard Watson. All the neighbouring farmers were invited, and, after the sport, entertained at a *genteel* supper served from Mrs. Ullock's. Wilson was the victor, and won a handsome silver drinking-cup, bearing an inscription, with date, etc."

The solemnity of these proceedings illustrates the enthusiasm with which this sport was cultivated in those days by such amateurs as Wilson, who really believed that they were keeping up one of the characteristic and time-honoured institutions of the country.[1]

Wrestling has always been the principal athletic exercise in the north of England, particularly in Cumberland, where it is still practised perhaps more generally than in any other part of the kingdom. "It is impossible," says the Professor, "to conceive

[1] Before passing from the subject, I may mention an amusing illustration of it, showing that, at a date considerably more recent than that of the above event, the rearing of game cocks was zealously practised in Scotland by some worthy gentlemen of the old school. One Sunday, in St. John's Chapel, Edinburgh, an old gentleman, a friend of my father's, was sitting gravely in his seat, when a lady in the same pew moved up, wishing to speak to him. He kept edging cautiously away from her, till at last, as she came nearer, he hastily muttered out: "Sit yont, Miss ——, sit yont! Dinna ye ken ma pouch is fu' o' gemm eggs!"

the intense and passionate interest taken by the whole northern population in this most rural and muscular amusement. For weeks before the great Carlisle annual contest nothing else is talked of on road, field, flood, foot, or horseback; we fear it is thought of even in church, which we regret and condemn; and in every little comfortable 'public' within a circle of thirty miles' diameter, the home-brewed quivers in the glasses on the oaken tables to knuckles smiting the board, in corroboration of the claims to the championship of a Grahame, a Cass, a Laugklen, Solid Yaik, a Wilson, or a Wightman. A political friend of ours, a stanch fellow, in passing through the Lakes last autumn, heard of nothing but the contest for the county, which he had understood would lie between Lord Lowther (the sitting member) and Mr. Brougham. But, to his sore perplexity, he heard the names of new candidates, to him hitherto unknown; and on meeting us at that best of inns, 'White Lion,' Bowness, he told us with a downcast and serious countenance that Lord Lowther would be ousted, for that the struggle, as far as he could learn, would ultimately be between Thomas Ford of Egremont, and William Richardson of Caldbeck, men of no landed property, and probably radicals!"[1]

During my father's residence at Elleray, and long after he became Professor, he steadily patronized this manly amusement, and though, as the historian of the subject, Litt,[2] remarks, "he never sported his figure in the ring,"

[1] *Blackwood*, December 1823.

[2] *Wrestliana: or, an Historical Account of Ancient and Modern Wrestling.* By William Litt. 12mo. Whitehaven.

he was not without skill and practice in the art, being, as an old wrestler declared, "a varra bad un to lick," which one can readily believe. He gave prizes and belts for the Ambleside competitions, such as had never been offered before, and the historian above mentioned describes in glowing terms how much the success of the annual sports in the neighbourhood was owing to his liberal encouragement. In some of his letters in after years, we shall meet with allusions to this subject, which he considered not unworthy of a special article in *Blackwood*. Speaking of the beauty of the spectacle presented by the ring at Carlisle, he thus amusingly parodied Wordsworth's lines on a hedge-sparrow's nest, which, he says, by a slight alteration, "eggs to men, and so forth, become a sensible enough exclamation in such a case :".

> "See two strong men are struggling there,[1]
> Few visions have I seen more fair,
> Or many prospects of delight
> More pleasing than that simple sight."

These imperfect reminiscences of my father's out-door life at Elleray may be appropriately closed by an extract from a clever little work recently published.[2] The author, Mr. Waugh, in his wanderings in Westmoreland, encountered at Wastdale Head, in the person of the innkeeper there, one of the most characteristic specimens that could well be found of a genuine old Laker, William Ritson. "I was most interested," says the

[1] In the original—

> "See five blue eggs are shining there."

[2] *Rambles in the Lake Country*. By Edwin Waugh. 12mo. London, Whittaker.

writer, "in Ritson's anecdotes of famous men who visited Wastdale. He had wandered many a day with Professor Wilson, Wordsworth, De Quincey and others. Ritson had been a famous wrestler in his youth, and had won many a country belt in Cumberland. He once wrestled with Wilson, and threw him twice out of three falls. But he owned the Professor was 'a varra bad un to lick.' Wilson beat him at jumping. He could jump twelve yards in three jumps, with a great stone in each hand. Ritson could only manage eleven and three quarters. 'T' first time 'at Professor Wilson cam to Wastd'le Head,' said Ritson, 'he hed a tent set up in a field, an' he gat it weel stock't wi' bread, an' beef, an' cheese, an' rum, an' ale, an sic like. Then he gedder't up my granfadder, an' Thomas Tyson, an' Isaac Fletcher, an' Joseph Stable, an' aad Robert Grave, an' some mair, an' there was gay deed amang 'em. Then, nowt would sarra, bud he mun hev a boat, an' they mun all hev a sail. Well, when they gat into t' boat, he tell't un to be particklar careful, for he was liable to git giddy in t' head, an' if yan ov his giddy fits sud chance to cum on, he mud happen tummle into t' watter. Well that pleased 'em all gaily weel, an' they said they'd tak varra girt care on him. Then he leaned back an' called oot that they mun pull quicker. So they did, and what does Wilson do then but topples ower eb'm ov his back i' t' watter with a splash. Then there was a girt cry—"'Eh, Mr. Wilson's i' t' watter!" an yan click't, an' anudder click't, but nean o' them could get hod on him, an' there was sic a scrowe as nivver. At last, yan o' them gat him round t' neck as he popped up at teàl o' t' boat,

an' Wilson taad him to kep a good hod, for he mud happen slip him ageàn. But what, it was nowt but yan ov his bit o' pranks, he was snurkin' an' laughin' all t' time. Wilson was a fine, gay, girt-hearted fellow, as strang as a lion, an' as lish as a trout, an' he hed sic antics as nivver man hed. Whativver ye sed tull him ye'd get yowr change back for it gaily soon. . . . Aa remember, there was a "Murry Neet" at Wastd'le Head that varra time, an' Wilson an' t' aad parson was there amang t' rest. When they'd gotten à bit on, Wilson med a sang aboot t' parson. He med it reight off o' t' stick end. He began wi' t' parson first, then he gat to t' Pope, an' then he turned it to t' devil, an' sic like, till he hed 'em fallin' off their cheers wi' fun. T' parson was quite astonished, an' rayder vex't an' all, but at last he burst oot laughin' wi' t' rest. He was like. Naabody could stand it. . . . T' seàm neet there was yan o' their wives cum to fetch her husband heàm, an' she was rayder ower strang i' t' tung wi' him afore t' heàl comp'ny. Well, he took it all i' good pairt, but as he went away he shouted oot t' aad minister, 'Od dang ye, parson, it wor ye at teed us two tegidder! . . . It was a' life an murth amang us, as lang as Professor Wilson was at Wastd'le Head.'"

In the same year that Wilson settled at Elleray, an agreeable addition was made to the society of the neighbourhood by the arrival of a family of the name of Penny, who took up their abode at Gale House, Ambleside. The Misses Penny were the daughters of a Liverpool merchant, and removed to Windermere for the sake of its proximity to the residence of their eldest sister, who

had been married for some years to Mr. James Penny Machell of Hollow Oak and Penny Bridge. Wilson soon became acquainted with these ladies, and an intimacy gradually sprung up with the fair inhabitants of Gale House, which by and by led to frequent mention of his name in the correspondence of Miss Jane Penny. Writing in girlish confidence to a friend who has sent her a piece of dress, she informs her that "the jacket has been much admired; I wore it at a ball at Kendal, and there was only one like it in the room—that was worn by Lady Lonsdale; it will always remind me of one of the pleasantest evenings I ever spent. I danced with Mr. Wilson; *he* is the only one of my partners worth mentioning."

It is not very difficult to perceive why it was one of the "pleasantest evenings" ever spent.

A ball or party seldom took place at Ambleside or elsewhere in the neighbourhood, at which Mr. Wilson and Miss Jane Penny were not present. De Quincey speaking of the gaieties at Low Brathay, the residence of his friend Charles Lloyd, says that at one of the social gatherings there he "saw Wilson in circumstances of animation, and buoyant with youthful spirits. . . . He, by the way, was the best male dancer (not professional) I have ever seen. . . . Here also danced the future wife of Professor Wilson, Miss Jane P[enny], at that time the leading belle of the Lake country." They were undoubtedly a couple of very uncommon personal attractions. A spectator at a ball given in Liverpool in those days, relates that when Mr. Wilson entered the room with Miss Penny on his arm, the dancers

stopped and cheered them, in mere admiration of their appearance.

Another extract from a letter of Miss Penny gives some further information about Mr. Wilson. There had been a regatta at Windermere :—

"It proved universally pleasant. I think I never enjoyed anything more than I did that week. The day of the regatta we spent the morning at Mr. Bolton's, Storr's Hall, and sailed upon the lake the greater part of the day. We had the honour of being steered by a *real* midshipman, a strikingly fine young man of the name of Fairer. Mr. Wilson gave us a ball at the Inn in the evening. I had the honour of opening it with him, and of course I spent a charmingly delightful evening. We are likely to have a most delightful acquisition to our society this winter in Mrs. and Miss Wilson, mother and sister to our favourite. They are very nice people indeed. I think Mrs. Wilson one of the finest and most ladylike women I have seen for a long time. They mean to be at Elleray all winter, which will make it very pleasant to us. I hope we shall see a great deal of them. Mr. Wilson is flirting with a pretty little widow who lives in Kendal. She is generally admired by the male part of creation, but not by our sex. I think her appearance is very pretty, particularly her figure, but I think her deficient in feminine propriety and modesty. Her husband has been dead some years; she was married at fourteen, and is still quite a girl in appearance. I don't know whether Mr. Wilson's attentions to her will end in a marriage, but I hope not,

for his sake. I think he is deserving a very superior woman."

There is a pretty touch of female character about this relation; the evident *penchant* for Mr. Wilson, the reserved manner of speaking of him, the slight grudge, if so it may be called, against the "little widow," the constant recurrence to his name, the interest taken in those belonging to him, all declare very plainly how much *tendresse* there lay in the wish, "he deserves a very superior woman." And most truly did he obtain one.

The flirting with the "little widow" was but the amusement of idle hours, and Wilson had now begun seriously to feel the want, as he called it himself, of "an anchor," without which, he said, he should "keep beating about the great sea of life to very little purpose." A closer intimacy with Miss Jane Penny revealed qualities more precious than those which shine most in the light of ball-rooms, and he found that "the belle of the lake district" was also such a woman as was worthy of his whole heart's love, and wanted no quality to fit her for giving happiness and dignity to his life. It took some time, however, before his mind settled down to this conclusion. The image of Margaret still rose before him tenderly in his solitary hours: he had as yet found no woman's heart in which he could confide so utterly as he had done in hers. Among other projects to divert his thoughts, he meditated an expedition into Spain along with Blair and De Quincey; and in the course of the year 1809, he and the former occupied themselves for some time assiduously in the study of Spanish, in order to qualify themselves for enjoying

the journey. The intelligence of Bonaparte's fresh descent upon that country caused the breaking off alike of their plan and their studies.

The following letter addressed about this time to his friend Mr. Harden, who was about to proceed to Edinburgh to edit the *Caledonian Mercury*,[1] gives some idea of the state of his mind and prospects :—

"My dear Harden,—I received your interesting letter this morning about an hour ago, and cannot delay answering it for a single day, deeply concerned as I feel myself in everything that regards your happiness. That you are to leave the clouds and mountains of this our delightful land, gives me, as far as my selfish emotions go, much real pain. I need not say how many happy days I have passed at Brathay, and how affectionately I regard the family living within its walls. Our friendship, which I fear not, in spite of absence or distance, will continue with unabated sincerity, was voluntary on both sides; and, during the few years we have known each other, neither of us has found cause to repent of the affection bestowed. That the determination you have formed is in all respects right, I firmly believe, and the consciousness of having in part sacrificed enjoyments so dear to you, for the sake of those you tenderly love, will no doubt for ever secure your happiness.

"After all, you will appear to me in the light of a distant neighbour, and when you have leisure to come to your beloved and beauteous lakes, if the smoke of

[1] Mr. Allan, the proprietor, was Mr. Harden's father-in-law.

Elleray is on the air, you know where you and yours will experience an affectionate welcome.

"That you will find the paper a good concern there is no doubt; and, at the same time, I cannot see that there will be anything very irksome in it. Living at this distance, and being no very vehement admirer of daily politics, I fear it will not be often in my power to give you effectual assistance. Anything I can do will at all times be cheerfully communicated. And, in the first place, a copy of the paper will not be amiss. Please mark what are your lucubrations. Of Oxford politics I neither know much nor care a great deal. Oxford has long been sunk beneath the love or admiration of thoughtful men, in spite of all her magnificence and all her learning. The contest has ere now been decided, though I have not heard the result. If I find that anything interesting can be said on the election of the Chancellor,[1] I shall transmit it to you in a frank, and you can either burn it or print it, as you think proper.

"On this subject, therefore, let me conclude with every warm wish for your success; and may your residence in Edinburgh afford every enjoyment you can desire.

"As for myself, all my plans of delight and instruction, at least on one great subject, are for the present abandoned. It would be tedious to enter into a detail of all unlucky causes which have occasioned this. Such as they are, they could not in the present juncture be avoided; and I have at least the satisfaction to

[1] Lord Grenville.

know, that my plans failed not from any want of zeal or determination on my part.

"I have not, however, by any means relinquished my scheme of going to Spain, and whether we shall meet this summer or not seems very doubtful. I agree with you that travelling will make me, for some years at least, happier than anything else. The knowledge it bestows can be acquired by no other means, and, unless a man be married, it seems very absurd to remain, during the prime of his youth, in one little corner of the world, beautiful and glorious as that corner may be. I do not, I hope, want either ballast or cargo or sail, but I do want an anchor most confoundedly, and, without it, shall keep beating about the great sea of life to very little purpose. Since I left Edinburgh, I have had a very dear old friend staying with me, and we have studied to the wonder of the three counties. We have made some progress in Spanish, though not much, the perplexity attending our change of scheme having occasioned some little interruption. I have written many poems, some of considerable length, which I may some night or other repeat to you over a social glass, or a twinkling fire.

"A little elegy I wrote on poor little Margaret Harden[1] last spring, and which I promised to send to your mother, has been lost. I shall, however, endeavour to recollect it the first time I can vividly recall the melancholy event that gave rise to it. Let it be considered as the affectionate sympathy of a friend. I am, you know, the worst correspondent breathing; yet to hear

[1] A daughter of his friend.

from you often and minutely, as to your pleasures and occupations, will always afford me genuine satisfaction.

"While I write this, your paintings of Stavely and the Brathay smile sweetly upon me, though all without doors is wild and stormy, it being the most complete hurricane I ever saw at Elleray. The windows of the parlour have, during the night, been almost entirely destroyed, and the floor is literally swimming. I cannot conclude without again observing what pleasure I shall have in hearing from you, especially while you are just entering on such a new scheme of life."

About the same time he took an excursion into Scotland. Before starting, he addressed De Quincey as follows :—

"MY DEAR DE QUINCEY,—I am obliged to leave this to-morrow for Glasgow. I therefore trouble you with this note in case you should think of coming over during my absence. I expect to return to Elleray in a few days, yet there is an uncertainty attending every motion of mine, and possibly of yours also. If you are ready for a start, I will go with you to-morrow on foot through Kentmere and Hawesdale to Penrith, and on Monday you can easily return by Ulleswater to Grasmere. The fine weather may induce you.[1] If you feel a wish to look at Glasgow and Edinburgh, would you

[1] The proposal to walk over so much ground proclaims De Quincey to have been no weak pedestrian. Although he was a man considerably under height and slender of form, he was capable of undergoing great fatigue, and took constant exercise. The very fact of his being a walking companion of Wilson's speaks well for his strength, which was not unfrequently taxed when such a tryst was kept. Perhaps in later years, of the two men he preserved his activity more entire.

take a trip with me on the top of the coach? I will pledge myself to return with you within eight days. If so, or if you agree to the first plan only, my pony or horse is with my servant who carries this, and you can come here upon it. I hope you will do so. There is no occasion for wardrobe. I take nothing with me, and we can get a change of linen. The expense will be small to us.—Yours ever affectionately,

"JOHN WILSON.

"ELLERAY, *Saturday*, 1809."

Of this pedestrian excursion we have a glimpse in the biographical notice of his friend John Finlay, with whom they spent a few hours at Moffat.[1]

I now come to speak of his poetry, and I am fortunately enabled, from the preservation of his letters to his friend Mr. John Smith, the Glasgow publisher, to give some account of his first publication, for which the materials should otherwise have been wanting. The first trace I find in MS. of poems afterwards published is in the year 1807. A small notebook contains a considerable number of sonnets, composed in the autumn of that year, a selection from which appeared among the miscellaneous pieces appended to *The Isle of Palms*. His commonplace books contain the whole of the latter poem, parts of it apparently written down for the first time, and other parts being final copies of the work as sent for revision to his friend Blair. The alterations in the first draught are more of entire passages than of phrases. It is evident that he never composed without first forming a clear conception of what he intended to

[1] *Blackwood*, vol. ii. p. 188.

embody in each particular poem. The prose outlines of some pieces in these books are sometimes so full as to require only their translation into verse to entitle them to the name of poems. Of this the sketch entitled "Red Tarn," already given, may be taken as a specimen. The contents of these books show, in fact, that poetry was not a mere amusement with him, but a serious study, and that he had in those days very extensive plans of composition, on which he entered with an earnest desire to use well the gifts with which he had been endowed.[1]

His first communication on the subject to Mr. Smith is from Edinburgh, and is as follows :—

"EDINBURGH, 53, QUEEN STREET,
*Wednesday Evening, December* 13 1810.

"DEAR SIR,—I have, during the three last years written a number of poems on various subjects, from which I intend to form a selection for the press. The principal poem, entitled *The Isle of Palms*, which will give its name to the volume, is descriptive of sea and

[1] Dr. Blair, in a letter, has expressed to me the following opinion :- "I have been always at a loss to know why your father did not follow further his youthful impulsion towards verse. I thought him endowed beyond all the youthful poets of his day, and in some powers beyond any of his contemporaries. I believe he had more of absolute deep and glowing enthusiasm than any of them. He might require a severe intellectual discipline and learned study to balance that natural fire and energy for the composition of a great work. But he had both will and ability for severe thought, and he had the capacity for searching and comprehensive inquiry, and such a wonderful power of storing materials and of managing them to his use, that I never could, nor can I now, understand why, loving poetry as he did, he left it. He had a flood of eloquence which not one of the other poets who have lived in his day had or has." This is the opinion of the man most familiar with my father's mind.

island scenery, and contains a love-story. It is nearly 2000 lines. The second is entitled "The Anglers' Tent." It contains nearly forty stanzas of seventeen lines each, in the same measure as Collins' Ode on the Superstitions of the Highlands. The third is a blank verse poem upon Oxford. The rest it is needless to particularize. I can furnish as many poems as will make a volume of 350 or 400 pages. As you have an opportunity of knowing the probable merit of any works of mine from Finlay, Blair, and others, I offer my poems in the first place to you. In a publication of such magnitude, I feel my own character deeply concerned, and will therefore insert nothing that does not please myself. The volume might in size resemble the octavo edition of the *Lady of the Lake*, and sell for the same price.

"If you are willing to purchase from me the copyright of 400 pages, such as I have described, I am ready to listen to your terms. I may, without presumption, say that at Oxford my name would sell many copies, nor am I unknown either in Cambridge or London. But you will judge for yourself. I am not a man who would thoughtlessly risk his reputation by a trivial or careless publication.

"I would prefer disposing entirely of the copyright to any other plan, as I wish to be free from all trouble or anxiety about it. In the case of a first publication I know that booksellers ought to be cautious. But I am now past the days of boyhood, and I feel that I shall come before the world, if not in the fulness of my strength, at least with few youthful weaknesses.

"As I am uncertain of being soon in Glasgow, I shall

expect an answer to this as quickly as convenient to yourself. Should we agree about this volume, I have other works in contemplation that I know will attract public notice.—I am, Sir, your obedient Servant,

"JOHN WILSON."

A few days subsequently he replied to Mr. Smith's proposals; part of which was that the work should be printed by Ballantyne:—

"MY DEAR SIR,—Your proposals seem perfectly reasonable and honourable, and I have no objection to agree to them. I have to mention, however, that it will be impossible for me to have my poems ready for publication as soon as you wish. I was indeed ignorant of the season of publication, and also imagined that the printing would take much more time than I understand it will do.

"For a few months to come my time will not, I fear be at my own disposal; for besides several important engagements, I have been very unwell lately, and may perhaps be obliged to take a short voyage somewhere. Considering all these circumstances, it would seem that the publication of my poems must be deferred for a considerable time. Perhaps, on the whole, this may be of advantage.

"I cannot believe that a volume of that size could be printed in less than four months from the commencement of printing it. You will consider, therefore, of this hasty note, and arrange matters with Ballantyne, etc. etc.—I am, yours truly,

"JOHN WILSON."

In April 1811 he writes from Elleray. He is on the eve of being married, and wants all the ready money he can get. He proposes, therefore, to dispense with some of those standard works "which no gentleman's library should be without,"—Annual Registers, Parliamentary Histories, Statistical Accounts, best editions of various Classics in Russia, etc. etc.

"ELLERAY, *Tuesday morning,*
(*April* 1811.)

"MY DEAR SIR,—Since my arrival here I have been tolerably busy, and have written several small poems that please me, and it is to be hoped will produce the same effect on several thousand of the judicious part of the reading world.

"My second longest poem I have also given the last polish to, and it now looks very imposingly. In a week or two, when the spring has a little advanced, I shall emigrate to the 'Isle of Palms,' and build myself a cottage there, both elegant and commodious, and subject to no taxation. I have this day written to Blair about Finlay, and expect to hear all particulars from him. If anything further has occurred about his affairs in Glasgow, I should like to hear from you.

"The principal object of my present letter is to speak to you about some books I wish to part with, being either tired of them or having duplicates.

"The following is a list of some of the best. If they suit you, you will take them, or any part of them, *at your own price*, most of them being books that you could sell easily. . . .

"Out of these, I think, you might find some that

might suit you well. I go to Liverpool to-morrow, to James Penny, Esq., Seel Street, where I should like to hear from you on receipt of this. You might make something upon them, and I be enabled to take a little longer marriage jaunt, in these hard times money being scarce.

"On my return, I shall send you some portion of my manuscript, of which, if you make any use beyond yourself, I don't fear it will be judicious. Remember that few are entitled to pass judgment on poetry.—I am, dear Sir, yours very truly, JOHN WILSON.

"*P.S.*—Should you ever publish any edition of any poet, and wish for preface, etc., you know where to apply."

## CHAPTER VI.

### MARRIAGE—"THE ISLE OF PALMS."

### 1811–15.

On the 11th of May 1811, the following letter was written by Wilson to his friend Mr. Findlay :—

"Ambleside, *May* 11, 1811.

"Dearest Robert,—I was this morning married to Jane Penny, and doubt not of receiving your blessing, which, from your brotherly heart, will delight me, and doubtless not be unheard by the Almighty. She is in gentleness, innocence, sense, and feeling, surpassed by no woman, and has remained pure, as from her Maker's hands. Surely if I know myself I am not deficient in kindness and gentleness of nature, and will to my dying hour love, honour, and worship her. It is a mild and peaceful day, and my spirit feels calm and blest. You know what it is to possess a beloved woman's affections, and such possession now makes me return grateful thanks to my God, and remember former afflictions with resignation and gratitude. On this tranquil day of nature and delight, to think of my earliest, best, oh! best-beloved friend, I may say, adds a solemn feeling to my dreams, and your most affectionate heart will, I am sure, be made glad to hear such words from my lips.

In my heart you will ever live among images of overpowering tenderness, and to hear from you when convenient will ever gladden him who never felt, thought, or uttered word to you but those of affection and gratitude. God bless you, my dearest Robert, your wife, and all that you love!—I am, your kindest brother,

"JOHN WILSON."

I don't know if any man ever conveyed the intimation of his marriage in terms more unaffectedly beautiful than these. In their quiet depth of natural affection that inner spirit is truly revealed, which, amid all varieties of energy and enjoyment, ever found its most congenial life among the tender sanctities of home, and connected its highest delights with a genuine sense of religion. Thenceforth his life had a deeper purpose, and his home was a place of pure sunshine, whatever clouds darkened the sky without. Of her who made it so, it may be said, she was

> "A blooming lady—a conspicuous flower;
> Admired for beauty, for her sweetness praised;
> Whom he had sensibility to love,
> Ambition to attempt, and skill to win;"

one in whose gentleness and goodness he found long years of happiness.

His energies were not called forth by the mere humour of the hour to prove what they were, but by the solemn realization of the high purpose for which they were given.

He did not make the usual wedding tour, but took his bride directly to his cottage home. The fascination

of his new life did not, however, engross him to the exclusion of work, much temptation as there was to a blissful idleness in his lot. The various expensive tastes he indulged, as well as his generous habits, could not have been so constantly exercised, had he not been in the enjoyment of a large fortune. No doubt he lived both at Oxford and Elleray with the free munificence of one who understood the charms of hospitality, and the satisfaction of bestowing pleasure upon others, but at neither period was he wasteful or careless of money. At the time of his marriage, therefore, he was in easy circumstances, and his wife's fortune, added to his own, made him a rich man. There was no care for the future; worldly matters were in a smiling condition; everything around the young couple was *couleur de rose*. Days passed away quickly; nothing disturbed the life of love and peace spent in that beautiful cottage home. Time brought with it only increase of happiness. Children were born; and to live at Elleray for ever was the design of the poet who loved to look upon

> "The glorious sun
> That made Winander one wide wave of gold,
> When first in transport from the mountain-top
> He hailed the heavenly vision."

These halcyon days were ere long interrupted by misfortune. But though that stern schooling was necessary to the full development of Wilson's character and powers, he had already, as we have seen, determined to give the world some fruit of his meditative hours during these apparently idle years at Elleray.

Three months after his marriage he again addressed Mr. Smith on the subject of his poems:—

"ELLERAY, *August* 11, 1811.

"It is now so long since you have heard from me, that I daresay you begin to entertain rational doubts of my existence. I am, however, alive and well; better both in mind and body than when I last saw you, and unless the damnation of my poems affect my health and spirits, likely for a considerable time to be off the sick-list.

"So many things have occurred, if not to occupy, at least to interrupt my time since my marriage, which took place on the 11th of May, that I thought it best not to write you till I found myself in some measure settled, and in a hopeful way of doing some good. I have written a considerable number of poems of a smaller size since my marriage, so that were the first poems of the collection finished, I think I have MS. enough for a volume of 400 pages, which I am desirous it should be. I know not how it is, but I have felt a strange disinclination to work at the longest poem; but on receiving your answer, all minor occupations shall be laid aside, and the work be proceeded with in good earnest. Indeed, such is my waywardness of fancy, that I feel constantly impelled to write each day on a different subject, which I should be prevented from doing were a day fixed for the commencement of the printing. Suppose we say that on the 1st of October everything shall be ready for going to press; and if so, you may depend upon it that the press shall never be allowed to remain idle one day for want of matter.

It would be most satisfactory for me to retain the MS. of my poems in my own hands, except such quantity as need be in the printer's hands. Thus, I will send the longest poem by cantos, there being four, and so on. I cannot in a letter sufficiently explain my reasons for wishing this; but unless you agree to it, it will be very painful to me, and I am confident it will be for the interest of the work. With respect to preface, I am doubtful if I shall have one; if so, it will consist of a very few pages, two or three at the most. I suppose the preface will be numbered separately from the poems, and therefore may be printed after them, should I like it, and in like manner the title-page, etc.

"With respect to the size of the volume, I am still partial to that of *Marmion;* or, if you choose, a little smaller, only as many or more lines in each page. A thinly printed book of that size looks very badly. There will be verses of many different measures, though none exceeding twelve syllables. I think that a rather smaller type would look better, since the poems are miscellaneous. But all these particulars I leave to yourself. I shall expect to hear from you as soon as you can decidedly fix matters with me, and I hope that you will find me a tractable and reasonable author. The sooner everything is fixed the better, as otherwise I shall never set to with invincible fury. If the printing can commence by the beginning of October, the first book of the *Isle of Palms* will be sent to you by the 10th of September. You should also advertise the work in the literary notices of the Reviews, and immediately; but all this I will leave to yourself."

"ELLERAY, KENDAL, *September* 17, 1811.

"DEAR SMITH,—I send you at last the first canto of the *Isle of Palms*, ready for the press.

"I had expected Mr. Blair here to revise the poem, but he did not come, so I had to send it to him, and he returned it only yesterday, without any alteration (though with many compliments), and I had to fill up the blanks myself. The manuscript is in Mr. Blair's handwriting, and is, I trust, legible. As to punctuation, I suppose the printer uses his discretion.

"I am going on correcting and writing, and certainly never will keep the press waittng for me. The proofs will, of course, be sent to me; but I conceive that double proofs are altogether unnecessary.

"Let it go to press immediately, and write me when you think it right to inform me of your proceedings.

"The first canto will, I believe, occupy 32 pages at all events, as there are nearly 600 lines.

"You will give strict injunctions to Ballantyne to let no one see the proof-sheets. For the *Isle of Palms* is a wild tale, and must not be judged of piecemeal. But there are many reasons for this.

"J. WILSON."

"ELLERAY, *Sept.* 27 *and* 28, 1811.

"I am glad that you are pleased with the manuscript on the whole. The introductory stanzas are perhaps not, at first reading, and in manuscript, very perspicuous; but they were written upon principle, and will, I doubt not, give pleasure when the canto is thought of together, and distinctly embraced in one whole. Blair and Wordsworth were both delighted with them, and, as I

shall have a very short preface, I am not afraid of their seeming obscure. At the same time, I shall be obliged to you for any remarks of the kind, as, though I have written nothing without due thought, all hints should be, and will be attended to, and gratefully received.

"I am in daily expectation of receiving the second canto from Blair, written over in the same manner, and think you may be expecting it on Thursday. Indeed, fear not of having regular and sufficient supplies.

"The whole *Isle of Palms* is of a wild character, though, I trust, sufficiently interspersed and vivified with human feelings to interest generally and deeply. Its wildness and romantic character being qualities that suffer greatly by piecemeal quotation, render me desirous of its being seen entire or not at all; but still this is not a matter of much importance, as I fear nothing when the poem comes before the public. I know the public taste, and neither will violate nor cringe to it, and, with its own merits, and the respectable way in which it will be given to the world, I am fearless of its success. I find that the *Isle of Palms* will be nearer 3000 than 2000 lines. Of the other poems, I know there are many that will be more popular, and, therefore, I expect that, as the printing proceeds, you will see reason to confide in those hopes of my success, which you have already been good enough to entertain.

"On the whole, I think Ballantyne ought to print the work, if you can make good terms with him. Blue stockings are dirty things, but not very deleterious.

"Next letter, I expect to hear from you positively when you begin printing, that I may never be from

home, and keep the devils from getting cool. In ten days I shall have sent you the first three cantos, containing above 2000 lines, and then I am not afraid of my heels being pressed upon, as correction will be my only task.

"All the booksellers in Oxford know me well. Indeed, I once talked to Parker about publishing some poems there, but, though he was most willing to undertake it, I afterwards changed my mind, for the University is but a dullish spot, though undoubtedly many copies will be sold there.

"The whole copy shall be sent in Blair's writing, or in a hand still better; and if there are any directions necessary about correcting the press, of which you think it probable I may be ignorant, you will instruct me. I am still in hopes of Blair coming here soon.

"Poor Grahame, I hear, is gone; let me hear some particulars; he was a truly estimable being."

The reference here is to the Rev. James Grahame, author of "The Sabbath," and other poems. My father greatly esteemed him and his poetry, and at this time composed an Elegy to his memory,[1] which was published anonymously while the *Isle of Palms* was going through the press.

Another letter is sent by and by along with the third canto of the *Isle of Palms*, which had been kept some time by Mr. Blair. He says:—"I expect you will like it fully more than any of the preceding; and Blair thinks it equal to any poetry of modern times.

[1] "Lines sacred to the memory of the Rev. James Grahame, author of 'The Sabbath,' etc. 'A man he was to all the country dear.' 4to. Glasgow: Smith and Son."

The fourth canto I will send to him this day; so Ballantyne will have it in time, although I fear he has been stopped for want of this one, which will never again be owing to me.

"I have had a long letter from John Ballantyne, most anxiously requesting a share in the work, or any concern in it that I would grant, so that his name should appear in the imprint. He wishes to have, 500 copies to [sell], but on what terms I do not very clearly understand.

"I think that if he could be allowed some kind of share or connexion with it, it might be well, as he has, I suppose, good connexions. I wish to hear from you immediately upon this subject, and I cannot answer his letter till I know your wishes and views on it. It augurs well, his anxiety. Should you wish to see his letter? He says that Longman is now preparing his winter catalogue; and that insertion of the title there would *double* the *first demand*. This seems fudge, although same time it should be sent for insertion in that catalogue, of which you probably know more than I do. I have advertised the work in the Kendal paper, and shall in one or two of the Liverpool.

"Let me hear from you if the paper has been sent to Ballantyne, and if you think the work may be out by Christmas. Stir Ballantyne up with a long pole, and henceforth depend upon my being punctual."

From these and other letters, it will be seen that the poet was by no means a careless man of business; and that if he was pretty confident of success, he did not neglect any means to secure it.

In his next letter he complains bitterly of the delay in the printing, not having heard from Ballantyne for a month, and then proceeds to give some practical suggestions regarding the lines on Grahame :—

"The copies of the 'Lines, etc.,' came safely to hand. They are exceedingly well printed and accurate in all respects. One copy I gave to Lloyd; the other to my wife's sister, both of whom were greatly pleased. I find that it will be in my power to distribute a few copies without suspicion; and there is a bookseller in Kendal who would, I think, dispose of half a dozen very easily. Send me, therefore, per coach, a dozen copies; six to my own account, and six for the trade, which I will send to the bookseller in Kendal; and if he sells them, he will account to me for them. Let me hear how they take; now that Edinburgh is filling, perhaps some copies will be going off. I would wish a copy to be sent to Mr. Alison, and one to Mr. Morehead, the Episcopal clergyman in Edinburgh, with 'from the author' on the title-page. Grahame was known about Carlisle, and I should think some of the trade there would take copies; Durham also. Are there any inquiries made after the author? Is it attributed to any one? You should tell a paragraph to be extracted from it in each of the Edinburgh papers; perhaps the same two as in the Glasgow papers. Some copies would sell in Oxford if seen there; I should also think in Liverpool. A passage ought also to appear in the *London Courier* and in the *Scots Magazine;* and also very early in other magazines. It is perhaps not worth all this trouble."

The elegy attracted considerable attention, and a second edition was soon called for. His next letter is written in December:—

"I have had many letters from Edinburgh highly commending the 'Lines,' which I understand are considerable favourites there, though I find I am strongly suspected in that quarter. With respect to giving my name, you may now use your own discretion."

At Christmas he was in Edinburgh at his mother's, with his young wife and her sisters. He writes to Mr. Smith:—

"The volume gets on tolerably. Page 250 has gone to press this day. All the manuscript is in Ballantyne's hands. He thinks the volume would not be the worse of being 450 pages. In that case, would you wish the lines on Grahame to be included? Fergusson, Cranstoun, and Glassford think them better than anything Grahame himself has written. The *Eclectic* is favourable enough, but stupid enough too! Who, in writing an elegy, would give a critical dissertation on a poem? The motto is a good one, and the punctuation excellent, except in two cases, which do not destroy the sense.

"Walter Scott talks to me in great terms of what he has seen of the 'Isle.'[1] The elder Ballantyne is in raptures, and prophesies great popularity. Considerable

[1] Sir Walter, writing to Miss Joanna Baillie about this time, says:—"The author of the elegy upon poor Grahame is John Wilson, a young man of very considerable poetical powers. He is now engaged upon a poem called the 'Isle of Palms,' something in the style of Southey. He is an eccentric genius, and has fixed himself on the banks of Windermere, but occasionally resides in Edinburgh, where he now is. He seems an excellent, warm-hearted, and enthusiastic young man: something too much, perhaps, of the latter quality, places him among the list of originals."

expectations are formed here among the blues of both sexes, and I am whirled into the vortex of fashion here in consequence.

"I shall say nothing to any one of the dedication. Send Mr. M'Latchie a copy of the 'Lines,' 'with the author's affectionate regard,' and one to Mr. Gill with my 'respectful compliments.'

"You ought certainly to come here before the publication, and soon, to arrange everything. I think we shall attract some attention."

A little glimpse of the life at 53 Queen Street, and the pleasant footing subsisting between the relatives gathered there, is afforded in a note of young Mrs. Wilson's about this time to her sister. She thanks "Peg" for her note, which, she says, "was sacred to myself. It is not my custom, you may tell her, to show my letters to John." She goes on to speak of Edinburgh society, dinners and evening parties, and whom she most likes. The Rev. Mr. Morehead is "a great favourite;" Mr. Jeffrey is a "horrid little man," but "held in as high estimation here as the Bible." Mrs. Wilson, senior, gives a ball, and 150 people are invited. "The girls are looking forward to it with great delight. Mrs. Wilson is very nice with them, and lets them ask anybody they like. There is not the least restraint put upon them. John's poems will be sent from here next week. The large size is a guinea, and the small one twelve shillings."

After sundry delays from want of paper or other causes, the volume duly appeared on the 20th of February 1812, entitled, *The Isle of Palms, and other*

*Poems*, by John Wilson. The potent name of Longman, whose catalogue could work such wonders, came first, followed by those of Ballantyne and Co., Edinburgh, and John Smith and Son, Glasgow. It was affectionately dedicated to the author's old teachers, Professors Jardine and Young. How the work was received may be gathered from his own letters. Poets are seldom entirely satisfied with the reception of their works. The author of the *Isle of Palms* had no great reason to complain, and he did not do so. At any rate, any dissatisfaction he felt, as will be seen, took the very practical form of urging all legitimate means for promoting the sale of the work.

TO MR. SMITH.

"53, QUEEN STREET, 1*st April* 1812,
*A day consecrated to Poets.*

"MY long-delayed visit to Glasgow has been entirely put a stop to by the miserable weather and other causes, till I find that it will not be in my power to make it out at all for nearly two months to come. Mrs. Wilson is in that state now that I could not comfortably leave her, and therefore it will not be in my power to see you till the time I mention.

"From your last letter it would appear that the *Isle of Palms* has hitherto been tolerably successful. In Edinburgh it is much read, praised, etc., but I question if the sale of it has been very great. A less enterprising set of men than Edinburgh booksellers I never had the misfortune to meet with.

"From what you told me I doubt not that Longman will advertise it properly. I have certainly seen it occasionally in several papers, but not so often as many

other volumes of far less moment (poetical); and almost all the booksellers I have spoken to here agree in stating that the London advertising is very dull and insufficient. I mention this as I hear it, without supposing for an instant that anything will be wanting on your part to forward the sale of the volume. It seems evident to me that some steps should be taken to make the volume known better than it is, and first of all by inserting occasional extracts in newspapers. I shall take care to do something in the Edinburgh and London papers. But what is of more importance is the provincial sale in England. Considerable inquiry was made after them in Liverpool; and had there been copies there, many would have sold. And I think you should still establish some correspondence with the booksellers there. Two hundred of Crabbe's poems were sold in Liverpool. In Manchester many, many books are sold; one shop of considerable magnitude is kept by a Mr. Ford. But it seems certain to my mind that you must bestir yourself through the towns of England, for the people are so stupid as not to know where to send for them, unless they come to the town where they live. This I had proof of from Liverpool in abundance.

"I have sent Southey a copy. He will, I know, review it in the *Quarterly*, if he likes it, which I think probable; otherwise he will not. Jeffrey likes it much; but will very likely abuse it for all that. I see it will be reviewed in the next *Edinburgh Quarterly Review*, but I suppose it is a despicable effort; its praise or blame will be alike indifferent.

"I find that people distrust their own judgment more

than I had ever believed possible, and durst not admire anything till they can quote authorities. I shall be happy to hear from you when at leisure. Glasgow criticism is not worth regarding; but I wish to hear from you an exact account of the number of copies sold by you in Glasgow, etc., to the public, and also of the number which you have altogether disposed of to the Edinburgh booksellers; London and Oxford, too, if you have heard anything from those quarters. I have as yet had no correspondence with England about it; here I am not a little caressed by the great, but I would excuse their caresses, if the public would buy my volume. If the volume do ultimately succeed, and nothing has yet occurred to make me suppose that it will not, then I shall in a year or two come before it again in strength; but if not, I shall court the Muse no more.

" Have any of my poems gone to Paisley or to the Sister Isle? Give me the names of as many of the purchasers as you can. Have you ever sent Watson his copies? for they had not been seen at Calgarth so late as last week, and I suppose the Kendal bookseller sent his there. Have any been sent to Cambridge or Birmingham? two places, by the bye, well joined together. The longer your letter is the better, and by making a parcel of it, you may send the letters of the Oxford booksellers, and anything else you desire, but taking care not to write till you have time to send me a full and long letter."[1]

[1] The anxiety and disappointment of the author as to the early sale of the volume does not seem altogether unreasonable, when we find that in Edinburgh, where the chief demand was to be looked for, " the trade" received the work so cautiously, as the following " subscription list" indi-

In the next number of the *Edinburgh Review* appeared a criticism of the *Isle of Palms*, what publishers would call a "favourable notice," but, it would appear, not quite to the taste of the author. He would probably have preferred a good "cutting up," to the measured and somewhat patronizing approval of the reviewer. On the 3d of May, he writes to Mr. Smith :—

"I write this in great haste, it being near two o'clock on Sunday morning, and at eight I leave Edinburgh on a fishing excursion to Kelso for a week.

"Jeffrey's review is beggarly. I don't much like the extract; it is too much of an excerpt, too quackish; but please yourself. The other review is a masterpiece of nonsense and folly."

Soon after he writes again from Elleray :—

"I am meditating many other poems, and probably shall begin to write soon. I know that I can in a year write another volume that will make the *Isle* hide its head. But unless the *Isle* travels the Continent a little

cates :—"*The Isle of Palms and other Poems.* By John Wilson. Demy 8vo, retail at 12s.; under 10, 8s. 6d.; above, 8s. A few copies Royal 8vo. at sub. John Ballantyne & Co., two hundred copies, demy; Manners & Miller, twenty-five; Archd. Constable & Co., twenty-five copies; Jno. Anderson, twenty-five copies; Wm. Blackwood, six copies."

The last item in the list looks specially curious now; but at that time Mr. Blackwood's business was in its infancy, and the future Christopher North was unknown to him.

About the same time, Longman and Co. wrote to Mr. Smith, to report the London "subscription :"—"We received a copy of Wilson's Poems from Ballantynes, and our clerk, who subscribes our books, took it round the trade yesterday and this morning; but as the author is not known amongst the London booksellers, we are sorry to say we have been enabled to subscribe only between forty-five and fifty, though, from what you say of the merit of the work, and what we hear of it from other quarters, we have no doubt of its selling very well here when it is known."

more before that time, I shall not throw pearls before swine in a hurry."

"ELLERAY, *Monday Morning, Nov.* 23, 1812.

"MY DEAR SMITH,—The day after I received your last, I left Elleray for Ireland, on a visit to my sister, who lives near Killarney. I stayed there a month, and on my return have received the melancholy intelligence of my dear brother's death.[1] Since then I have not had the power of thinking of my literary concerns. We often know not how dearly we love our near relations, till called on to mourn over their graves. I know that I tenderly loved my dear brother, but his death has affected me more than I could have imagined, and I yet feel as if I could never again be happy or cheerful enough to resume my former occupations.

"I leave everything relating to my poems to your own judgment. If they do not sell, my poetry never will; for though I may write better, they are good enough for popularity, far better than many that circulate widely, and they deserve to sell.

"Southey would have gladly reviewed them in the *Quarterly*, but found it impossible, without speaking at length of himself and Wordsworth; so he from conscience declined it. Blair I have heard nothing of since I saw you, nor am I likely to hear. A book must ultimately owe its circulation to itself, and not to the grace of reviewers. Take such steps about a second edition as you choose. I would advise, if there be one, no more than 750 copies. I will add no new poems, nor preface, nor note.

[1] His brother Andrew.

"I would fain write you at greater length, but feel unable. Let the beginning of my letter be my excuse."

The extent of his plans of composition at this time is indicated by a "List of subjects for meditation," in one of his books, containing no less than 131 titles of proposed poems. In what spirit he entered on his work, the following note written in his commonplace book may illustrate:—

"*June* 12, 1812.—Expected that a volume will be completed by June 12, 1814. May the Almighty enlighten my mind, so that I may benefit my fellow-creatures, and discharge the duties of my life.—J. W."[1]

The list of subjects begins on the opposite page, and the proposed character of the strain in each case is indicated by such notes as these:—

"Red Tarn—melancholy and mournful.

"The widow—beautiful and fanciful.

"A poet—characteristic and copious.

"On the death of Gough among the hills—different view of it from W. and Scott.

"City after a plague—awful and wild, solemn.

"Town and country—vigorous and bold.

"On the Greek sculpture—in strong heroics.

[1] It will not, I hope, diminish in any reader's eyes the respect due to this solemn and surely most heartfelt aspiration, that it is copied from a page, never meant for other eyes to see, beginning with so different a kind of memorandum as this—"Small black muffled hen set herself with about eight eggs on Monday night or Tuesday morning, 7th July." So far am I from being offended by this curious contrast, that I specially note the fact as a characteristic illustration of the wholeness and sincerity of the man, who, whether it were high poetic meditation or the breeding of game cocks that occupied him, did it with all his heart and strength, each in its season.

"The murderer and the babe—a contrast; the moral to be—to watch well our own hearts against vice."

A calculation is then given for a volume of 500 pages out of a selection of this large list, in which 170 are allotted to "St. Hubert," and 50 each to "The Manse" and "The Ocean Queen," and to the "City after a Plague" only 5. The proposed volume did not appear till January 1816, not from any lack of materials, but in consequence of a change of plan, the "City after a Plague" having developed into a drama, instead of "St. Hubert," while of the other subjects very few were ever wrought out, and some that were have been withheld from posterity. Of subjects completed and published, the titles of some will be recognised from the above extract. It is perhaps to be regretted that so rich a promise did not come to perfection; but it was no sudden or fortuitous impulse that made the poet choose to develop his poetical powers in another form than that of verse.

So much meantime of poetry. Of the four happy years that were passed in the cottage at Elleray, from 1811 to 1815, there is little to be recorded. It would appear that in the former year he had come to the resolution of joining the Scottish Bar, and, in that view, became a member of the Speculative Society, then in a highly flourishing condition. He must of course have spent some part of the succeeding winters in Edinburgh, but the only trace of the matter I find is the following allusion in a letter from his friend Blair, dated December 1813:—

"MY DEAR JOHN,—I desire very much to hear further

from you, and to know how your great soul accommodates itself to the Law Class, and other judicial sufferings and degradations, and more about your Greek and polite literature."

I find also, that he opened, on the 4th of January 1814, the debate in the Speculative Society—topic, "Has the War on the Continent been glorious to the Spanish nation?"—in the affirmative, when the majority of the Society voted with him. He only wrote, it appears, one Essay for that Society, on "some political institutions of military origin," of which there are some traces in one of his MS. books.

This happy life at Elleray was soon to come to a close. In the fourth year from the date of his marriage, there came a calamity so heavy and unlooked for that the highest fortitude was required to meet it, as it was met, bravely and cheerfully.

The circumstances which occurred to make it absolutely necessary to leave Elleray were of a most painful nature, inasmuch as they not only deprived Wilson of his entire fortune, but in that blow revealed the dishonesty of one closely allied to him by relationship, and in whom years of unshaken trust had been reposed. An uncle had acted the part of "unjust steward," and, by his treachery, overwhelmed his nephew in irretrievable loss. A sudden fall from affluence to poverty is not a trial easily borne, especially when it comes through the fault of others; but Wilson's nature was too strong and noble to bow beneath the blow. On the contrary, with a virtue rarely exemplified, he silently submitted to the calamity, and generously assisted in

contributing to the support of his relative, who, in the ruin of others, had also ruined himself. Here was a practical illustration of moral philosophy, more eloquent, I think, than even the Professor's own lectures, when he came to teach what he had practised. In such a noble spirit, and with a conscience void of offence, he prepared to quit the beautiful home where he had hoped to pass his days, and set his face firmly to meet the new conditions of life which his lot imposed. The following letter to De Quincey describes his journey from Elleray with his wife and infant family :—

"PENRITH, CROWN INN,
*Friday Evening, half-past Six*, 1815.

"MY DEAR FRIEND,—I found that it was impossible to see you again at your cottage before taking leave of Elleray. The tempestuous weather prevented me from going to Kendal on the day I had fixed, so I was forced to go on Thursday, a cold, rainy, and stormy day. Had I returned in the afternoon, I certainly would have cantered over to Grasmere for a parting grasp of cordiality and kindness ; but I did not return to Elleray till near eleven o'clock. We rose this morning at six, and got under weigh at eight. We arrived here about five, and the children being fatigued, we propose to lie to during the night. The post-boy being about to return to Ambleside, I gave Keir this note, which has no other object than to kindly wish you all peace, and such happiness as you deserve till we meet again. If I cannot pay you a visit at Christmas, we shall surely meet early in summer. I will write you from Edinburgh soon.

"Blair left Elleray on an opposite tack this morning; weather hazy with heavy squalls from the north-west. Mrs. Wilson begs to be kindly remembered to you, and so would doubtless the progeny were they of maturer age and awake.—Yours with true affection,

"JOHN WILSON."

"My books had not been sent to Elleray from the 'stamp-master's'[1] when I took my departure. If they still linger with fond, reluctant, amorous affection near Green's rotundities, perhaps you might wish to see those about Spain. If so, order them all to your cottage. The dinner in honour of Blucher and the Crown Prince at Ambleside, was, I understood, attended only by the Parson, the Apothecary, the Linnær;—the King, Lord North, and Mr. Fury, signifying nothing.

"Vale! iterumque vale!"

[1] Wordsworth.

## CHAPTER VII.

### LIFE IN EDINBURGH—THE BAR—THE HIGHLANDS—ELLERAY.

### 1815–17.

JOHN WILSON'S new home was now in Edinburgh. His mother received him and his family into her house, where he resided until the year 1819. Mrs. Wilson, senior, was a lady whose skill in domestic management was the admiration and wonder of all zealous housekeepers. Under one roof she accommodated three distinct families; and besides the generosity exercised towards her own, she was hospitable to all, while her charities and goodness to the poor were unceasing. This lady was so well known and so much esteemed in Edinburgh, that when she died, it was, as it were, the extinction of a "bright particular star;" nor can any one who ever saw her, altogether forget the effect of her presence. She belonged to that old school of Scottish ladies whose refinement and intellect never interfered with duties the most humble. In a large household where the fashion of the day neither sought nor suggested a retinue of attendants, many little domestic offices were performed by the lady of the house herself. The tea china, for example, was washed both after breakfast and tea, and carefully put away by her own

delicate hands. Markets were made early in the morning. Many a time has the stately figure of Mrs. Wilson, in her elegantly fitting black satin dress, been seen to pass to and from the old market-place, Edinburgh, followed by some favourite "caddie,"[1] bearing the well-chosen meats and vegetables, that no skill but her own was ever permitted to select. Shrewd sense, wise economy, and well-ordered benevolence marked all her actions. Beautiful and dignified in presence, she at once inspired a feeling of respect. Pious and good, she at the same time knew and understood the world; and false sentiment, or affectation of any sort, was not permitted to live near her; wit and humour she did not lack; but it is doubtful whether poetry was a material of her nature in any shape. Proud as she was of her son John, and great as his devotion was to her, he used always to say that his mother did not understand him. Sometimes, it is no great wonder if his eccentricity might have been a little too much for her order and regularity. It is very doubtful if any lady of the present *régime* could so wisely and peacefully rule the affairs of a household as did this lady,[2] when, for several years, she had under her roof two married sons, with their wives, children, and servants, along with her own immediate household, a

[1] Street porter.

[2] Mrs. Wilson, senior, was a keen Tory; and it is told of her that on hearing of her son contributing to the *Edinburgh Review*, she said to him significantly, "John, if you turn Whig, this house is no longer big enough for us both." She must have been well pleased with the principles of her daughter-in-law, who, writing after the Reform Bill passed, "thanked God she was born in the reign of the Georges."

son and two daughters, yet unmarried, making in all a family of fourteen persons. Yet peace and harmony reigned supreme; and there are now not a few of her grandchildren who remember this fine old lady, either as she moved through the active duties of her house, or, seated at the fireside on a chair, the back of which she never touched, dignified in bearing as a queen, took a short nap, awaking with a kindly smile at the sound of some young voice demanding a story, in the telling of which, like all good grandames, she excelled.

So, to the pleasant house of his mother, No. 53, Queen Street, Wilson changed his abode from dear sycamore-sheltered Elleray.

In 1815, he was called to the bar, along with his friend Patrick Robertson.[1] John Gibson Lockhart joined them in the year following. For a short time, but only for a short time, Wilson followed the usual routine of a professional promenading in the "*Hall of Lost Steps.*" He did sometimes get cases, but when he found them lying on his table, he said jocularly, when speaking of this afterwards, "I did not know what the devil to do with them!" The Parliament-House life was plainly not the thing which nature meant for him. The restrictions of that arena would not suit his Pegasus, so he freed his wings and took another course.

There are some pleasant fragments of his letters to his wife, written in holiday time, when he would now and then run away for a day or two to saunter, fishing-

[1] Among the young men, afterwards distinguished, who passed about the same time, were John Cay, Andrew Rutherfurd, P. F. Tytler, Sir William Hamilton, Thomas Maitland, Alexander Pringle, Archibald Alison, Duncan M'Neill, James Ivory, etc.

rod in hand, by the streams of pretty pastoral Peebles, and into Yarrow to visit the Ettrick Shepherd.

He writes from the "Head of the Yarrow," on "Wednesday morning, seven o'clock," in June 1815 :—

"MY DEAREST JANE,—I take time by the forelock merely to inform you that I am still a sentient being. On Sunday, I did not leave Sym's till near twelve o'clock. I called, on my way to Peebles, at Finlay's, at Glencorse, where I sandwiched for an hour, and arrived at Peebles about seven o'clock, a perfect *lameter*, my shoes having peeled my timbers. The walk was rather dreary. At Peebles I had to stop, and remained there all night. On Monday morning, at six o'clock (miraculous!) I uprose from the couch of slumber, and walked along the Tweed to Traquair Knowe (Mr. Laidlaw's). There I fished, and stayed all Monday, the place being very beautiful. Grieve joined the party that night, and several other people. Mr. Laidlaw is married, an insectologist and poet, and farmer and agriculturist. On Tuesday morning I walked to Hogg's, a distance of about eight miles, fishing as I went, and surprised him in his cottage bottling whisky. He is well, and dressed pastorally. His house is not habitable, but the situation is good, and may become very pretty. There being no beds in his domicile, we last night came here, a farmer's house about a quarter of a mile from him, where I have been treated most kindly and hospitably. The house and entertainment something *à la* Wastdale, but much superior. I have risen at seven o'clock, and am preparing to take a complete day's fishing among the streams near St. Mary's Loch.

"To-morrow night I fish down to Selkirk, to catch the coach to Hawick in the evening; thence on Friday morning to Richmond's, whom I will leave on Sunday evening. So if I can get a seat in the coach on Sunday night at Hawick, you will see me in Edinburgh on Monday morning before breakfast. Mrs. Scott informs me breakfast is ready, so hoping that you will be grateful for this letter, bald as it is, I have the honour to subscribe myself your obedient and dutiful husband,

"JOHN WILSON."

On one of these fishing excursions he had proceeded from St. Mary's Loch to Peebles, where he could not at first get admittance to the inn, as it was fully occupied by a party of country gentlemen, met together on some county business; on sending in his name, however, he was immediately asked to join them at dinner. It is needless to say that under his spell the fun grew fast and furious. No one thought of moving. Supper was proposed, and as nothing eatable was to be had in the house, Wilson asked the company if they liked trouts, and forthwith produced the result of his day's amusement from basket, bag, and pocket, in such numbers that the table was soon literally covered. As the Shepherd afterwards said, "Your creel was fu'—your shooting-bag fu'—your jacket-pouches fu'—the pouches o' your verra breeks fu'—half-a-dozen wee anes in your waistcoat, no' to forget them in the crown o' your hat, and last o' a', when there was nae place to stow awa' ony mair, a willow-wand drawn through the gills o' some great big anes."

The fresh fragrance of summer, as enjoyed by the running streams and "dowie dens o' Yarrow," combined with the desire to show his English wife something of the beauty of Scotland, suggested about this time an excursion, which was regarded by many as an act of insanity.

About the beginning of July my father and mother set out from Edinburgh on a pedestrian tour through the Western Highlands. That such a feat should be performed by a delicate young Englishwoman was sufficiently astonishing. A little of the singularity, no doubt, arose from the fact, that she was the wife of an eccentric young poet, the strangeness of whose actions would be duly exaggerated. Such a proposal, therefore, could not be made without exciting wonder and talk in the demure circles of Edinburgh society. Mrs. Grant of Laggan thus writes upon the subject to a friend:—

"The oddest thing that I have known for some time is John Wilson's intended tour to the Highlands with his wife. This gentle and elegant Englishwoman is to walk with her mate, who carries her wardrobe and his own,

> 'Thorough flood and thorough mire,
> Over bush, over briar;'

that is, through all the bypaths in the Central Highlands, where they propose to sleep in such cottages as English eyes never saw before. I shall be charmed to see them come back alive; and in the meantime it has cost me not a little pains to explain in my epistles to my less romantic friends in their track, that they are genuine gentle folks in masquerade. How cruel any

authority would be thought, that should assign such penance to the wearers of purple and fine linen, as these have volunteered."

A few facts relative to this romantic walk are not, after a lapse of so many years, lost sight of by those who remember meeting the travellers, and entertaining them kindly. Scotland was dear to Wilson's heart, as was the fair sisterland he was so loath to leave. Who has ever written such words about Highland scenery as he has done? Well he knew all those mist-laden glens in the far west; and the glorious shadows of the great mountains, beneath whose shelter he and his wife would rest after a long day's walk. In this tour they visited the Trosachs, Loch Katrine, and the smaller lochs in that neighbourhood, taking such divisions of the Western Highlands as suited their fancy. They did not "chalk out a route," or act as if "they had sworn a solemn oath to follow it." From Loch Lomond westward to Inverary, and thence northward by Loch Awe and Glen Etive, they wandered on—halting when wearied, either for a night, or a day or two, and always well received, strangers though they were; making friends too, in far-off places. Through the wild rampant cliffs and mountains, which lend so awful a grandeur to Glencoe, they proceeded to Ballachulish, billeting themselves upon the hospitable household of Mr. Stewart, where they received such kindness as made the remembrance of that family a bright spot in the wanderings of memory many years after, and meetings with its different members always agreeable. The district of country, however, which seemed to have the greatest

charm, and where they lingered longest, was that between Inverary and Dalmally. Loch Awe, with its wooded shores, noble bays, beautiful islands, and unsurpassed mountain range, topped by the magnificent crest of Ben Cruachan, whose mighty base, wood-skirted, sends its verdure-clad bounds gently to the margin of the deep waters—was an object too attractive for such lovers of nature soon to part from. Again and again they retraced their steps to this enchanting scene.

In this neighbourhood they found a resting-place for a time in Glenorchy, at the schoolmaster's house. Dr. Smith, the present clergyman of Inverary, remembers, when a youth, seeing this devoted pair travelling on foot in these parts; Wilson laden with their travelling-gear, and his gentle wife carrying in her hand the lighter portion of it. He says: "I remember well the feelings of wonder and admiration with which I regarded his manliness and her meekness; and whether it be that the thoughts of youth are apt to become indelible impressions, or that what awakened them was a reality in this case, as I am inclined to believe; the thoughts and feelings of youth still remain, so that over and high above all he wrote, I see the man, the earnest, generous man, who though singularly tolerant to others, cared not to measure any odds against his own consciousness of power. It was on this first visit in 1815 that some of those incidents occurred which are not easily forgotten, in a country where the acts of a stranger are narrowly noticed, though kindly interpreted. He and Mrs. Wilson, on their way to Glenorchy, passed a little thatched cottage close by the falls of the Aray. The spot was

beautiful; the weather had been wet, and the river rushed along its rocky bed with a fulness that was promising to the angler. It was too attractive to be passed, so they lingered, stopped, and waited for ten days or a fortnight, taking up their quarters at the cottage, and living on the easiest terms with its inmates.

"It is yet told, how on a Sabbath morning the daughter who served came into the room—the only one—where Mr. and Mrs. Wilson slept; and after adjusting her dress at the little mirror hanging by a nail on the unmortared wall, she was unable to hook her gown behind, but went at once to the side of the bed, from which they had not yet risen, saying, 'Do help me to hook my gown.' Mr. Wilson sat up in bed, and served her with the utmost good-nature. In Glenorchy, his time was much occupied by fishing, and distance was not considered an obstacle. He started one morning at an early hour to fish in a loch which at that time abounded in trout, in the Braes of Glenorchy, called Loch Toilà. Its nearest point was thirteen miles distant from his lodgings at the school-house. On reaching it, and unscrewing the butt-end of his fishing-rod to get the top, he found he had it not. Nothing daunted, he walked back, breakfasted, got his fishing-rod, made all complete, and off again to Loch Toilà. He could not resist fishing on the river when a pool looked invitingly, but he went always onwards, reached the loch a second time, fished round it, and found that the long summer day had come to an end. He set off for his home again with his fishing-basket full, and confessing somewhat to weariness. Passing near a farm-house

whose inmates he knew (for he had formed acquaintance with all), he went to get some food. They were in bed, for it was eleven o'clock at night, and after rousing them, the hostess hastened to supply him; but he requested her to get him some whisky and milk. She came with a bottle-full, and a can of milk with a tumbler. Instead of a tumbler, he requested a bowl, and poured the half of the whisky in, along with half the milk. He drank the mixture at a draught, and while his kind hostess was looking on with amazement, he poured the remainder of the whisky and milk into the bowl, and drank that also. He then proceeded homeward, performing a journey of not less than seventy miles.[1]

"On leaving the Glenorchy school-house, they went to Glen-Etive. On their way along the banks of Loch Etive, and near the mouth of the river Conglas, they came to a shepherd's house, where they intended to wait for a few days to fish. The shepherd was servant to Mr. Campbell of Achlian. Wilson had a note to him from his master. The morning had been fine, but, as often happens in this climate, it had become very wet towards evening. As the pedestrians reached the cottage drenched, on knocking at the door, the shepherd's wife thought not well of them, perhaps startled by the height and breadth of the shoulders of him who stood at the door, for her husband was a little man. She said at once, 'Go on to the farm-house, we cannot take in gangrels here.' The note put all right, and the

[1] This adventure is told, with a slight variation, by the Professor himself in his "Anglimania."—*Works*, vol. vi. p. 334.

shepherd with his wife, both dead now, often told the circumstance to enforce hospitality to strangers, as by so doing one might entertain angels unawares."

This kind of reception was at last no novelty to them. A gentleman now residing near Inverness remembers their arriving at Foyers, with a letter of introduction to the late proprietor of that picturesque estate, from their friend Mrs. Grant. Wilson was dressed in sailor fashion, and his wife's attire was such as suited a pedestrian in the mountains. The Highland lassie who received them at the door had not been in the habit of seeing gentlefolks so arrayed, and naturally taking them for "gangrel bodies" from the South, ushered them into the kitchen.

On their returning route they passed through a village where Wilson, on a subsequent expedition, met with adventures to be afterwards recorded. Their appearance is described by the writer of a collection of Highland Sketches,[1] from whose narrative I borrow the substance of the following account:—

On a fine summer evening, the eyes of a primitive northern village[2] were attracted by the appearance of two travellers, apparently man and wife, coming into the village, dressed like cairds or gipsies. The man was tall, broad-shouldered, and of stalwart proportions; his fair hair floated redundant over neck and shoulders, and his red beard and whiskers were of portentous size. He bore himself with the assured and careless air of a

[1] Mr. William Stewart.

[2] Mr. Stewart calls it Tomintoul, but that must be a mistake, as at a subsequent date my father speaks of it as a place visited for the first time.

strong man rejoicing in his strength. On his back was a capacious knapsack, and his slouched hat, garnished with fishing-hooks and tackle, showed he was as much addicted to fishing as to making spoons :—

> "A stalwart tinkler wight seemed he,
> That weel could mend a pot or pan ;
> And deftly he could thraw the flee,
> Or neatly weave the willow wan'."

The appearance of his companion contrasted strikingly with that of her mate. She was of slim and fragile form, and more like a lady in her walk and bearing than any wife of a caird that had ever been seen in those parts. The natives were somewhat surprised to see this great caird making for the head inn, the "Gordon Arms," where the singular pair actually took up their quarters for several days. Thence they were in the habit of sallying forth, each armed with a fishing-rod, to the river banks, a circumstance the novelty of which, as regarded the tinker's wife, excited no small curiosity, and many conjectures were hazarded as to the real character of the mysterious couple.

A local hero named the King of the Drovers, moved by admiration of the peculiar proportions of this king of the cairds, felt a great desire to come into closer relations with the stranger. He was soon gratified. A meeting was arranged, in order to try whether the son of the mountain or the son of the plain were the better man in wrestling, leaping, running, and drinking; and in all of these manly exercises the great drover, probably for the first time, found himself more than matched.

After nearly two months' tour, the travellers came down by the low-lying lands of Dunkeld, where Mr. Wilson was somewhat suspiciously regarded, being by some good folks looked upon as a lunatic. Mrs. Izett, a lady of accomplishments and taste, and a great admirer of genius, gives a description of Mr. and Mrs. Wilson's arrival at her house at midnight. She writes to Mr. John Grieve, a friend of my father's, who lived many years in Edinburgh, a man of good judgment, and refined and elegant pursuits :—

"Had you a glimpse of Byron, Southey, etc.? By the way, Southey brings your friend Wilson to my recollection. We had the pleasure of seeing him and his agreeable partner here. Though they were here for several nights, I really could not form an opinion of him. They arrived here late at night. The following day, and *greatest part of the night*, he passed rambling among our glens, alone; and the day after, the whole of which he passed within doors, I happened unfortunately to be confined to my room with the headache—at least during the greatest part of it—and thus lost the opportunity you kindly afforded me, of enjoying what I should have considered a great treat. There is something very striking in the countenance of Mr. Wilson, particularly his eye. His head I think quite a model for a minstrel; there is so much of fire, and at the same time so much simplicity. His wanderings, etc. etc., made some people in this quarter—no matter who—think him quite mad, and they will not be persuaded to the contrary. The eccentricities of a poet certainly do bear some resemblance to this at times, and to say truth, Mr. Wilson

has his good share of these. I was quite tantalized the day he passed in the house that I was not able to appear, and avail myself of so good an opportunity to become acquainted with him. I saw more of Mrs. Wilson, and was much pleased with her. She made out her *walks* you see, and after this you must allow woman to possess resolution and perseverance. I greatly admired the patience and good-humour with which she bore all the privations and fatigues of her journey. She might make some of your southern *beaux* blush for their effeminacy."

My mother during this tour walked one day twenty-five miles. The travellers had been overtaken by a mist falling suddenly over them when in Rannoch. They missed the beaten track of road, and getting among dreary moors, were long before they discovered footing that could lead them to a habitation. My father made his wife sit down among the moss, and taking off his coat, wrapped her in it, saying he would try and find the road, assuring her, at the same time, that he would not go beyond the reach of her voice. They could not see a foot before them, so dense and heavy was the dreary mist that lay all around. Kissing his wife, and telling her not to fear, he sprang up from where she sat, and bounded off. Not many seconds of time elapsed, ere he called her to come to him—the sound guiding her to where he stood. He was upon the road; his foot had suddenly gained the right path, for light there was none. He told her he had never felt so grateful for anything in his life, as for that unexpected discovery of the beaten track. He knew well the dangers of those wild

wastes when mists fall, and the disasters they not unfrequently cause. A weary walk it was that brought them to "King's House," the only inn at that time for travellers among these Highland fastnesses.

On their return from this wonderful tour, they were quite the lions of Edinburgh. It was fully expected by the anxious community of the fairer sex, that Mrs. Wilson would return weather-beaten and robbed of her beautiful complexion, sunburnt and freckled. But such expectations were agreeably disappointed. One lady who called upon her directly after her return, old Mrs. Mure of Caldwell, exclaimed, "Weel, I declare, she's come back bonnier than ever!"

My father's own account of their adventures is contained in the following letter to the Ettrick Shepherd, soon after his return, written evidently in the full enjoyment of the highest health and spirits,—to use his own phrase, "strong as an eagle:"

"EDINBURGH, *September*.

"MY DEAR HOGG,—I am in Edinburgh, and wish to be out of it. Mrs. Wilson and I walked 350 miles in the Highlands, between the 5th of July and the 26th of August, sojourning in divers glens from Sabbath unto Sabbath, fishing, eating, and staring. I purpose appearing in Glasgow on Thursday, where I shall stay till the Circuit is over. I then go to Elleray, in the character of a Benedictine monk, till the beginning of November. Now pause and attend. If you will meet me at Moffat, on October 6th, I will walk or mail it with you to Elleray, and treat you there with fowls and Irish whisky. Immediately on the receipt of this, write a letter to me,

at Mr. Smith's Bookshop, Hutcheson Street, Glasgow, saying positively if you will, or will not do so. If you don't, *I will lick you*, and fish up Douglas Burn before you, next time I come to Ettrick. I saw a letter from you to M—— the other day, by which you seem to be alive and well. You are right in not making verses when you can catch trout. Francis Jeffrey leaves Edinburgh this day for Holland and France. I presume, after destroying the King of the Netherlands, he intends to annex that kingdom to France, and assume the supreme power of the United Countries, under the title of Geoffrey the First. You, he will make Poet Laureate and Fishmonger, and me admiral of the Musquito Fleet.

"If you have occasion soon to write to Murray, pray introduce something about 'The City of the Plague,' as I shall probably offer him that poem in about a fortnight or sooner. Of course I do not wish you to say that the poem is utterly worthless. I think that a bold eulogy from you (if administered immediately) would be of service to me; but if you do write about it, do not tell him that I have any intention of offering it to him, but you may say, you hear I am going to offer it to a London bookseller.

"We stayed seven days at Mrs. Izett's, at Kinnaird, and were most kindly received. Mrs. Izett is a great ally of yours, and is a fine creature. I killed in the Highlands 170 dozen of trouts. One day 19 dozen and a half, another 7 dozen. I, one morning, killed 10 trouts that weighed nine pounds. In Loch Awe, in three days, I killed 76 pounds' weight of fish, all with the fly. The Gaels were astonished. I shot two roebucks, and had

nearly caught a red-deer by the tail—*I was within half a mile of it at farthest.* The good folks in the Highlands are not dirty. They are clean, decent, hospitable, ugly people. We domiciliated with many, and found no remains of the great plague of fleas, etc., that devastated the country from the time of Ossian to the accession of George the Third. We were at Loch Katrine, Loch Lomond, Inverary, Dalmally, Loch Etive, Glen Etive, Dalness, Appin, Ballachulish, Fort William, Moy, Dalwhinny, Loch Ericht (you dog), Loch Rannoch, Glen Lyon, Taymouth, Blair-Athole, Bruar, Perth, Edinburgh. Is not Mrs. Wilson immortalized?

"I know of 'Cona.'[1] It is very creditable to our excellent friend, but will not sell any more than the 'Isle of Palms,' or 'The White Doe.'[2] The 'White Doe' is not in season; venison is not liked in Edinburgh. It wants flavour; a good Ettrick wether is preferable. Wordsworth has more of the poetical character than any living writer, but he is not a man of first-rate intellect; his genius oversets him. Southey's 'Roderic' is not a first-rate work; the remorse of Roderic is that of a Christian devotee, rather than that of a dethroned monarch. His battles are ill fought. There is no processional march of events in the poem, no tendency to one great end, like a river increasing in majesty till it reaches the sea. Neither is there national character,

[1] *Cona, or the Vale of Clwyd, and other Poems.* Edinburgh. 12mo. The author of this little volume was Mr. James Gray, one of the teachers in the High School, an accomplished man, a friend of my father's. He afterwards took orders in the Church of England, and was appointed to a chaplaincy in India. He died in September 1830.

[2] Wordsworth's "White Doe of Rylstone."

Spanish or Moorish. No sublime imagery; no profound passion. Southey wrote it, and Southey is a man of talent; but it is his worst poem.

"Scott's 'Field of Waterloo' I have seen. What a poem!—such bald and nerveless language, mean imagery, commonplace sentiments, and clumsy versification! It is beneath criticism. Unless the latter part of the battle be very fine indeed, this poem will injure him.

"Wordsworth is dished. Southey is in purgatory; Scott is dying; and Byron is married. Herbert[1] is frozen to death in Scandinavia. Moore has lost his manliness. Coleridge is always in a fog. Joanna Baillie is writing a system of cookery. Montgomery is in a madhouse, or ought to be. Campbell is sick of a constipation in the bowels. Hogg is herding sheep in Ettrick forest; and Wilson has taken the plague. O wretched writers! Unfortunate bards! What is Bobby Miller's[2] back shop to do this winter! Alas! alas! alas! a wild doe is a noble animal; write an address to one, and it shall be inferior to one I have written—for half a barrel of red herrings![3]

"The Highlanders are not a poetical people. They are too national; too proud of their history. They imagine that a *colleyshangy* between the Macgregors

[1] The Honourable William Herbert, Dean of Manchester, died in 1847, in his 70th year. He was author of several vols. or translations from the Icelandic and other northern languages. The poem here referred to is evidently "Helga," which was published in 1815.

[2] One of the principal Edinburgh booksellers.

[3] An excusable challenge. The "Address to a Wild Deer" is one of his happiest compositions.

and Campbells is a sublime event; and they overlook mountains four thousand feet high. If Ossian did write the poems attributed to him, or any poems like them, he was a dull dog, and deserved never to taste whisky as long as he lived. A man who lives for ever among mist and mountains, knows better than to be always prosing about them. Methinks I feel about objects familiar to infancy and manhood, but when we speak of them, it is only upon great occasions, and in situations of deep passion. Ossian was probably born in a flat country![1]

"Scott has written good lines in the 'Lord of the Isles,' but he has not done justice to the Sound of Mull, which is a glorious strait.

"The Northern Highlanders do not admire *Waverley*, so I presume the South Highlanders despise *Guy Mannering*. The Westmoreland peasants think Wordsworth a fool. In Borrowdale, Southey is not known to exist. I met ten men at Hawick who did not think Hogg a poet, and the whole city of Glasgow think me a madman. So much for the voice of the people being the voice of God. I left my snuff-box in your cottage. Take care of it. The Anstruther bards have advertised their anniversary; I forget the day.

"I wish Lieutenant Gray of the Marines[2] had been devoured by the lion he once carried on board his ship to the Dey of Algiers, or that he was kept a perpetual

[1] For a very different and more serious criticism of Ossian's Poems by him, see *Blackwood's Magazine* for November 1839.

[2] Charles Gray, author of several Scotch ballads, poems, and songs. He died in 1851.

prisoner by the Moors in Barbary. Did you hear that Tennant[1] had been taken before the Session for an offence against good morals? If you did not, neither did I! Indeed it is, on many accounts, exceedingly improbable.—Yours truly, JOHN WILSON."

Apparently the *Isle of Palms* had by this time made way with some success, if it did not quite realize the hopes of the author. Previously to the writing of the above letter, he had put himself in communication with Mr. Smith in reference to the publication of his new volume:—

"EDINBURGH, 53, QUEEN STREET,
*September* 5, 1815.

"I have as many poems as would make such another volume as the *Isle of Palms*, which I wish to publish this winter. The longest is nearly 4000 lines. I have as yet spoken of it to no one, friend or bookseller. I have made up my mind not to publish it unless I sell the copyright for a specific sum. I shall not correspond with any other person on the subject till I hear from you, and what your intentions may be concerning it.

"I hope that you are quite well. I have been in the Highlands for two months, with Mrs. Wilson, and am strong as an eagle."

Having received no reply, he wrote a few days later:—

"I felt myself bound by friendship and other ties to acquaint you with my intention before I communi-

[1] William Tennant, Professor of Oriental Languages in St. Andrews; uthor of "Anster Fair;" died in 1843.

cated it to any other person of the trade. As the winter is fast approaching, I wish to have this business settled, ere long, either in one way or another, and will therefore be glad to hear from you as soon as convenient. It is probable that I may appear in Glasgow during the Circuit, to smell the air of the new court, but my motions are uncertain. If I do make it out, I trust the oysters will be in season."

Early in October he writes again, from Glasgow :—

"The volume which I have now ready for the press will contain any number of pages the publisher may think fit from three to four hundred, so as to be sold for twelve shillings, and to be a counterpart of the *Isle of Palms*.

"The first and longest poem is entitled 'The City of the Plague,' is dramatic, and consists of nearly four thousand lines, or between three and four thousand. The scene is laid in London, during the great Plague of 1665, and the poem is intended to give a general picture of the situation of a plague-struck city, along with the history of a few individuals who constitute the persons of the drama.

"The second poem, 'The Convict,' is likewise dramatic and in blank verse, and its object is to delineate the passions of a man innocently condemned to death, and the feelings of his dearest relations. It is between two and three thousand lines.

"The third poem is a dramatic fragment, entitled 'The Mariner's Return,' about six hundred lines, and principally consisting of descriptions of sea scenery.

"The remainder of the volume will be made up to

the length deemed necessary for poems of a miscellaneous character, in rhyme and blank verse.

"It is not my intention to publish this volume unless I dispose of the copyright; and the sum I have set on it is £200.

"If you feel any inclination to purchase it *of yourself*, one word can do it. If not, one word between friends is sufficient.

"If you determine against purchasing it *of yourself*, then you can inform me whether or not you would be willing, along with Murray, or Miller in Edinburgh, or any other bookseller, to give me that sum for the copyright.

"If you determine against having anything to do with it, as a principal, on these terms, then, for the present, the subject drops."

Mr. Smith appears to have declined the sole responsibility of the publication, which was ultimately undertaken by Constable, along with whose name those of Smith and of Longman appeared on the title-page. Shortly after this communication my father paid a visit to Elleray, probably for the purpose of inspecting the state of the place, and make arrangements for letting it. On the 31st of October he reports his progress to his wife:—

"ELLERAY, *Friday Night, Oct.* 31, 1815.

"DEAREST JANE,—I am not to blame for not having written before this night, owing first to a mistake about the post-night; and secondly, to the want of sealing-wax or wafer; so, if angry, pray become appeased. On Monday I reached Penrith, the weather being coldish

to Hawick; then I took inside to Carlisle, thence outside to Penrith. At Penrith I dined with an old Oxonian, and walked on to Pooley Bridge; there I found Jeany[1] waiting for me, and proceeded to Patterdale, which I reached about ten o'clock; dark and stormy night. On Tuesday morning I walked to Ambleside, sending Billy (whom I found there) with pony to Elleray. From Ambleside I walked to De Quincey's, with whom I dined; we returned per coach to Ambleside, and drank punch with Dr. Scandler, who is considerably better. The night being indifferent I stayed all night at Chapman's; on Wednesday I sent for pony and rode to Elleray. I found Mrs. Ritson alive and well. Rode down and called at the parsonage; all glad to see me. Called at the Island; saw Mrs. Curwen and children, well and looking well; W. Curwen in Cumberland; dined therefore at Ullock's; went in the evening to parsonage and drank tea. Thursday, walked about Elleray; dined at Pringle's; met the Baxters and Greaves; pleasant party, Greave falling asleep immediately after dinner. Mr. Pringle is looking tolerably, though I fear he will feel the effects of the accident all his days. Blind of one eye, and confused at times in his head. Mrs. Pringle handsome and kind, and Miss Somerville with her. Friday, have spent all this day along with myself and Mr. Ritson, and Billy at Elleray. The place which had been a wilderness is again trim and neat, and looks as well as possible. The trees are greatly grown, and everything seems thriving and prosperous. There are eight chickens with

[1] A favourite pony.

whom I am forming a friendship; and I feel as idle as ever.

"I dare say no more about a place so dear to us both; would to God you were here!

"But next time I come, whenever that is, you shall be with me. I have not seen the 'stamp-master.' Saturday and Sunday I intend keeping alone, and at Elleray. Monday I shall probably go to Hollow Oak or Ulverston. The Misses Taylor have gone to Bath. Of the Hardens I know nothing. Mr. Lloyd is worse than ever, and gone to Birmingham; I believe never to return. Kitty Dawes (mother to Dawes) is dead. So is the old miller of Restock, and young Bingham of Kendal, two well-known cockers.

"De Quincey will accompany me to Scotland; but I will write about his rooms in a day or two.

"I have not yet been in the new house. The little detestable bit of avenue looks tolerable. Of Robert and Eliza I know nothing. Kiss everybody you meet for me up stairs. Write to me, care of Mrs. Ullock, immediately.—Thine with eternal affection,

"JOHN WILSON."

Of what happened in the interval between this date and January following there is no record. No doubt he was busy with the proof-sheets of the *City of the Plague*. In January 1816, he was again at Elleray, and thus relates his adventures to Mrs. Wilson:—

"BOWNESS, *Sunday, January* 1816.

"DEAREST CZARINA,—I hope that you received my scroll from Carlisle, which I committed to the custody

of Richard, and therefore doubt not that he would fulfil his trust.

" I supped at the Pearsons', and was very kindly received there; Miss Alms being in love with me, which I think I told you before. Going down to their house I fell *upon a slide*, and was most severely bruised, so much so that I had to be carried into a shop, and drink wine which the people very kindly gave me. This was an infernal fall, my rump and head suffering a dire concussion against one of the most fashionable streets. I however made out my visit, though still rather sick and headachy all night. Indeed, my journey seemed to consist wholly of disasters. In the morning (no coach going sooner) I pursued my journey to Penrith—day cold and snowy—outside for cheapness; I then got tired of the coach, and, after drinking a glass of wine and water, started on foot for Coleridge's at Pooley Bridge; there I dined, and, at half-past seven in the evening, feeling myself bold and chivalrous, I started again for Patterdale, against the ineffectual remonstrances of the whole family who all prophesied immediate death. The night was not dark, and in two hours I was seated in the kitchen of Mr. Dobson at a good fire. I then proposed crossing Kirkstone, when shrieks arose from every quarter, and I then found a young man had just been brought in *dead*, having been lost on Sunday evening coming from Ambleside, and only found that day. Of course, the melancholy accident made me give up all thoughts of pursuing my journey till daylight, so I supped and went to bed. Next forenoon at eleven o'clock, a party

of men arrived from Ambleside with the Coroner, and I found from them that the road though difficult was passable, so I faced the hill, and arrived safe at Chapman's in two hours and ten minutes, having slid along with great rapidity. The thaw was beginning, and had I waited another day, the snow would have been soft and impassable, as it lay in many places ten feet deep, and I walked over two gates. I dined with William Curwen, and walked to De Quincey's, which I reached at half-past one o'clock in the morning; he was at the *Nab*, and when he returned about three o'clock, found me asleep in his bed. I reached Elleray only last night, having spent the whole of Saturday with the lesser man; he walked to Elleray with me, where we drank tea; he then returned to Grasmere; and no sheets being on the bed, I walked to Bowness, and stayed all night. I am still here, and it rains severely. As yet, Elleray is all in the dark. I shall dine there to-morrow alone, but not stay all night, for the lonesomeness is insupportable. I will write a longer letter, and give you news. Nobody, I fear, has died here since I saw you. Billy is well, and his two nephews are at present residing with him at Elleray. His father and mother are expected daily, and a few distant relations.

"Lloyd is in a mad-house; Wordsworth and family from home. Write me on receipt of this (if not before); direct to me at Mrs. Ullock's, Bowness.—Eternally thine with all affection, J. WILSON."

During the next month he was constantly occupied

with the printers, and on the 13th of March he writes to Mr. Smith :—

"I ought long ago to have acknowledged the receipt of your different letters; but I have been busier than any man ever was before.

"My volume went round the trade to-day; with what success I know not. My expectations are but moderate. The volume is too thin and so is the paper, but I believe there is more printing and pages than 10s. 6d. books in general. I put your name into the title-page, which I shall ever be happy to do on similar occasions.

"These failures in Glasgow will not be favourable to me as an author."

The reception of the volume was altogether favourable; and it was recognised as indicating a marked increase of power and discipline in the mind of the author. With the exception of that first suggestion of the subject already referred to, I find no allusion to the principal poem nor any trace of it in note-books. Of the other poems, there are but four which correspond in title with any in the "List of Subjects" of 1812. These are "The Children's Dance," "The Convict," "Solitude," and "The Farewell and Return."

In the next number of the *Edinburgh Review*, the volume received a friendly criticism from the hand of Jeffrey, who, in reply to a letter from the author, unfortunately not extant, addressed the following interesting letter to him :—

"MY DEAR SIR,—I am extremely gratified by your letter, and thank you very sincerely, both for the kind-

ness it expresses, and the confidence it seems to place in me. It is impossible, I think, to read your writings without feeling affection for the writer; and under the influence of such a feeling, I doubt whether it is *possible* to deal with them with the same severe impartiality with which works of equal literary merit, but without that attraction, might probably be treated. Nor do I think that this is desirable or would even be fair; for part, and not the least part, of the merit of poetry consists in its moral effects, and the power of exciting kind and generous affections seems entitled to as much admiration as that of presenting pleasing images to the fancy.

"You wish, however, to be treated *as a stranger*, and, I think, I have actually treated you as one, for the partiality which I have already mentioned as irresistibly produced by your writings, certainly has not been lessened by the little personal intercourse we have had. I am not aware that it has been materially increased by that cause, and was inclined to believe that I should have felt the same kindliness towards the author of the work I am reviewing, although I had never seen his face. As to showing you no favour for the future on the score of the past, I am afraid if I do not exactly comply with your request, it will be more owing to my own selfish unwillingness to retract my former opinions and abandon my predictions, than from any excess of good-nature toward their objects. However, your request is very natural and manly, and I shall do what I can to let you have nothing more than justice, and save you from having any other

obligations to your critic than for his diligence and integrity.

"As to Wordsworth, I shall only say, that while I cannot at all agree, nor is it necessary, in your estimate of his poetical talents, I love and honour the feelings by which I think your judgment has been misled, and by which I most readily admit that your conduct should be governed. I assure you I am not the least hurt or offended at hearing his poetry extolled, or my remarks upon it arraigned as unjust or erroneous; only I hope you will not set them down as sure proof of moral depravity, and utter want of all good affections. I should be sorry that any good man should think this of me as an individual; as to the opinion that may be formed of my critical qualifications, it is impossible for any one to be more indifferent than myself. I am conscious of being quite sincere in all the opinions I express, but I am the furthest in the world from thinking them infallible, or even having any considerable assurance of their appearing right to persons of good judgment.

"I wish I had more leisure to talk to you of such matters; but I cannot at present afford to indulge myself any further. I think we now understand each other in a way to prevent all risk of future misunderstanding.—Believe me always, dear Sir, very faithfully yours, F. JEFFREY.

"92, GEORGE STREET, *Saturday Evening.*"

The pleasant relations thus established between these two men led to a still closer intimacy, which, though

unhappily interrupted by subsequent events, was renewed in after years, when the bitterness of old controversies had yielded to the hallowing influences of time.

Whether there was any work done during this year in poetry or prose, I cannot say; but in the way of acquiring materials for future "Recreations of Christopher North" there was undoubtedly a good deal. All the other memorials at least that I have of this year, and a good part of the next, are connected almost entirely with angling, and extensive "raids" into the Highlands. It would almost seem as if there was an unwillingness fairly to cast anchor and remain steadily at work. The stimulus to literary exertion had not yet come with imperative force, and in the interval, before he fairly girded himself up to regular work, he sought strength for it in his love of nature and pedestrian wandering. These excursions, it is but fair to observe, however, appear to have been confined to the proper vacation time of his profession.

Again and again he roams over country he had so often trod before, and in the year following that in which he introduced Mrs. Wilson to the beauties of his native land, he returned to the neighbourhood of Loch Awe, extending his tour into Inverness-shire, as we find from the following letters written in the spring and autumn of 1816 :—

"ACHLIAN, 29*th April* 1816.

"DEAR JANE,—I have risen at six o'clock to write to you. Your letter, I find, will not be here till Tuesday morning; I know not why. Curse all country posts!

"To be brief, James Fergusson[1] and I reached Glasgow on Monday; he went to the play; I did not. On Tuesday, I was tempted to stay in Glasgow, and saw Kean as Zanga in 'The Revenge.' It is heavy work, and he acted poorly, and is in every respect inferior to Kemble. On Wednesday, I went to Greenock by steamboat, of which the machinery went wrong, and blew up part of the deck, on which myself and two fattish gentlemen were sitting. This stopped us, and after a long delay we got into another steamboat, and arrived at Greenock. It was four o'clock. I found that I could only cross the water that night, so I thought it was needless; dined with Bissland, and went to the play, when I again saw Kean. I was too near him; he acted with occasional vigour, and his action is often good, but he rants abominably, and on the whole is no actor at all. On Thursday, I hired a boat and got to Ardentinny—distance eight miles; there fished a few miles, and got six dozen; then walked to Strachur, but on the way cut my foot severely, and awoke on Friday morning dog-lame. With great difficulty I reached, on Friday, the waterfall above Inverary, and was obliged to stop in a small cottage there. On Saturday, I fished up the stream (as when with you), and killed eighteen dozen. When evening came I was eight miles from Achlian, and so lame that I could not walk a step. I procured, therefore, a cart to drag me there, where I arrived at eleven o'clock, and found a warm welcome. Yesterday I

[1] A member of the Scottish bar, who married a sister of my father's friend, William Dunlop.

rested, and to-day intend going out in the boat for a little fishing. This wound in my heel will render my visit to Megerney impossible, for there is no horse-road, so I will write to-day informing Menzies of my mishap. Is not this a severe trial to one's temper?

"The wound is in itself insignificant, but is just on the sole of my heel, and is much festered, about the size of a shilling, so that I cannot walk a single step without the greatest difficulty and pain.

"I shall ride from this, back to Greenock if possible. Immediately on getting this (which I expect will be Thursday forenoon), write that moment -- directed to me at Achlian, *by Inverary*. On Wednesday the 8th, write to me at Miss Sym's, Glasgow, where I will be on the 10th, and at Edinburgh, on Saturday the 11th, probably about six o'clock. Your other letters, of course, become useless. I will write again first opportunity.—Thine with heart and soul till death,

"J. WILSON."

The manner in which he wounded his foot is not a little characteristic. He does not mention the real cause of it to his wife, but curiously enough a story communicated by Dr. Smith of Inverary, whose reminiscences have been already quoted from, explains this circumstance, the date of the occurrence he relates agreeing with that of the above letter:—

"At a point on the road near to the house which I now occupy, and close by the river-side, as he was on his way to Achlian, a large party of tinkers were

pitching their tents. There were men, women, and children—a band—some preparing to go to fish for their supper in the adjoining pool, and some, more full of action, were leaping. They were tall, powerful young men, ready for any frolic, and all the *bonhommie* of Mr. Wilson's nature was stirred in him. He joined the group; talked with them and leaped with them. They were rejoicing in their sport, when he, finding himself hard pressed, stripped off coat and shoes; but the river had had its channel once on the spot; it had left a sharp stone, which was only concealed by the thin coating of earth over it; his heel came down on that stone; it wounded him severely; and, unable to bear a shoe on, he had to go to Achlian. The tinkers would rather that the accident had happened to one of themselves, and they procured a cart in the neighbourhood in which he was conveyed to Achlian. The heel was carefully dealt with there by all but himself. Mrs. Smith,[1] then a little girl, tells me that her mother remonstrated often, but in vain; for he would fish, though scarcely able to limp; and one day, as he was fishing from the shore, a large trout, such as Loch Awe is remarkable for, was hooked by him. His line was weak, and afraid to lose it, he cast himself into the loch, yielding to the motions of the strong creature until it became fatigued and manageable. Then he swam ashore with his victim in subjection, and brought it home; but he was without the bandage, and his heel bleeding copiously."

This was no unusual mode of fishing with my father. As the Shepherd remarked: "In he used to gang, out,

[1] Then Miss Campbell, daughter of Mr. Campbell of Achlian.

out, out, and ever sae far out, frae the point o' a promontory, sinking aye further and further doon, first to the waist-band o' his breeks, then up to the middle bûtton o' his waistcoat, then to the verra breist, then to the oxters, then to the neck, and then to the verra chin o' him, sae that you wunnered how he could fling the flee; till last o' a' he would plump richt oot o' sight, till the Highlander on Ben Cruachan thocht him drooned. No he, indeed; sae he takes to the sooming, and strikes awa wi' ae arm, for the tither had haud o' the rod; and could ye believe't, though it's as true as Scripture, fishing a' the time, that no a moment o' the cloudy day micht be lost; ettles[1] at an island a quarter o' a mile aff, wi' trees, and an auld ruin o' a religious house, wherein beads used to be counted, and wafers eaten, and mass muttered hundreds o' years ago; and getting footing on the yallow sand or the green sward, he but gies himself a shake, and ere the sun looks out o' the clud, has hyucket a four-pounder, whom in four minutes (for it's a multiplying pirn the cretur uses) he lands, gasping through the giant gills, and glittering wi' a thousand spots, streaks, and stars, on the shore."[2]

With him the angler's silent trade was a ruling passion. He did not exaggerate to the Shepherd in the *Noctes* when he said that he had taken "a hundred and thirty in one day out of Loch Awe," as we see by his letters that even larger numbers were taken by him.

After the lapse of a week he again writes :—

"DEAREST JANE,—The Devil is a letter-sorter at the

[1] Directs his course. [2] *Noctes.*

Edinburgh Post-Office, so your Glenorchy letter of Thursday has not been sent to the place of his birth. The Inverary one I got on Saturday, which told me of your welfare, and the brats, which is enough. Where the other is gone is known only to the old gentleman, who will assuredly be hanged one day or other.

"I promised not to write any more; but thinking you will not be angry with me, I have ventured to scribble a few lines more.

"My heel is in *statu quo* (two Latin words which Robert will explain to you).

"I tried a day's fishing in Loch Awe, and killed a dozen fine ones. Yesterday I rode Achlian's charger to Craig. All here are well, and desire their love to you. Miss Campbell has been poorly, but mends apace. I have received most hospitable welcome. I slept last night in our old room. To-day I limped up to Molloy with my fishing-rod. Mrs. M'Kay there has just been brought to bed of a son, who is doing well. They inquired most kindly for you, and were delighted to see me. What a fishing! In one pool I killed twenty-one trouts, all of them about two pounds each, and have just arrived in time for dinner at Craig, loaded so that I could hardly walk. I have despatched presents to all around. Miss M'Intyre, with whom we dined, desires her love. Dr. M'Intyre is from home. I shall stay here all night, being tired. On Wednesday, I leave Achlian on horseback, so depend on seeing me on Saturday. That is our marriage-day. In you and in my children lies all my bliss on earth. Every field here speaks of thee.—Thine for ever, J. WILSON."

The next letter is two months later, the Court of Session having sat in the interval. Very probably, however, he was not particular in waiting till the last day of the summer sittings to start once more for his favourite Achlian and Loch Awe. I suspect the idea of eighteen dozen of trout out of the Aray would have influenced him more in these fine days than the mere chance of another brief before "the Lords" dispersed.

"ACHLIAN, *Monday, 22d July* 1816.

"DEAREST JENNET,—Your letter of Thursday I received here on Saturday, and as Sir Richard Strahan said when he fell in with the French fleet, 'We were delighted.'

"The day after I wrote last, namely, Monday, I walked up to the wooden bridge and fished there, killing fifteen dozen. Unluckily the family from home. On Tuesday I dined with Captain Archibald Campbell and his fair daughters at their cottage. We visited on Loch Fyne side, and met a pleasantish, smallish party. On Wednesday I left Inverary at a quarter before four in the morning, with young James M'Nicol, brother to Miss M'Nicol, and fished some moor farms about eight miles off; sport but moderate; fatigue great; slept like a top. On Thursday I dined with Mr. M'Gibbon, the clergyman, who lives in that nice place beyond the wooden bridge. Passed a most social evening, and stayed all night. On Friday I went to another class of moor farms, about eight miles from the wooden bridge, along with young Mr. Bell; had very bad sport indeed; separated from him by chance, and after wandering

among the hills for hours, got to the wooden bridge about ten at night. Found Miss Giles Bell and her sister returned; got supper, and in several hours their brother arrived in despair, thinking I was drowned. On Saturday morning returned to Inverary and packed up. Found a gig going to Dalmally which carried me snugly to Achlian, where I found all the worthy inhabitants well. On Sunday, crossed the Loch to Hayfield, and dined with Mr. M'Neill of that place.[1] In the evening a most terrific thunder-storm.

"To-day fished in Loch Awe; bad day; killed only one dozen, and returned to dinner; hitherto my sport has been but poorish. I feel unaccountably lazy, and doubt if I shall go to Rannoch at all.

"I am quite well, but more fatigued than you can imagine, so my letter is but shortish.

"Immediately on getting this, write me to Achlian, by Inverary, and send Barton's letter. Let thine be put into the Post-office before seven o'clock in the evening. You will please me by not going on board the 'Ramillies' till I return. But I do not countermand you, nor will I be the least angry if you do go. Bless the small creatures.—Everlastingly yours, J. WILSON."

"ACHLIAN, *August* 2, 1816.

"MY DEAREST JANE,—Since I last wrote you I have been where there are no posts or post-offices, and till to-day have had no opportunity of sending you a letter. I suppose you are incensed, and so am I. Your letters

[1] "My poor dear old friend M'Neill of Hayfield. God rest his soul! It is in heaven. At ninety he was as lifeful as a boy at nineteen."—*Noctes.*

have reached me safely, but not Barton's, which I have never seen. Therefore hope you have forgotten to send it to the post; if you have, keep it till I see thee. I have been over the moor of Rannoch, in Glencoe, and other glens near it; at the foot of Loch Ericht, and the country round Loch Treig; I have seen great scenery, undergone hardships, and am in good health. I returned to Achlian a few days ago, but the post was one day missed, and I sent this by a private hand to Dalmally, and thence to Edinburgh. I have had much good fishing, much bad, and much tolerable—picture of human life. Keep all letters till I see thee. But immediately on getting this write to me, care of Robert Findlay, Esq., Miller Street, Glasgow. I shall be there ere long, day I cannot fix, because conveyances are doubtful, but you will be looking upon me with a pleasant countenance somewhere about the 7th or 8th of this month. Recollect I left you on the 11th, so it is not so long since I went away as you said in your letter.

"I suppose Cadell wished to see me about the *Edinburgh Review*. This is conjecture. What he calls agreeable to me may turn out to be supercilious praise, saying I am not a good boy.—Farewell. J. WILSON."

From Achlian he now worked his way across to Blair Athole, whence he writes to tell how he fares. He is "lame in the knee," and has "not been in bed," but he is just starting, at 6.30 A.M., as if under vow or penance, on a journey of thirty-four miles!

"DEAREST JANE,—It is half-past six morning, and I

am just setting off to Braemar, anxious for your letter. I will write you at length first moment I have an opportunity, which will be in two or three days; meanwhile I am well, though lame in my knee.

"Obey all your directions, but, in addition to them, write on Friday (this day week) to me, care of Alexander M'Kenzie, Esq., Millbank, Dingwall. I have not been in bed, and am just setting off thirty-four miles. God bless and preserve thee and ours everlastingly!

"J. WILSON.

"BRIDGE OF TILT, BLAIR ATHOLE,
*Friday, August* 1816."

So northward he goes with his lame knee, as one burdened with some great exploring quest, which must be fulfilled at all hazards, and through all fatigues. Through the loneliest glens, up the highest mountain-tops, careless of weather, and finding "adventures" in the least likely places, he holds on to the north, and again to the west, till we light on him, after twenty-five miles' walk, sitting down to address his wife from the hospitable abode of his friend Mr. M'Kenzie:—

"MILLBANK, DINGWALL,
*Wednesday, 13th August.*

"MY DEAREST JANE,—I wrote you last from Abergeldy, and I am afraid you may have been longing for a letter before this reaches you. Such, I hope, is not my vanity, but mutual kind love; may it be our only blessing here and hereafter, and I am satisfied.

"From Abergeldy I started (I think the day after I wrote you) and proceeded to the head of the Don river.

My burden was truly insupportable. The same evening I got to Inchrory on the river Aven or Avon, a most lonely place, perhaps the most so in Scotland, where I slept. Next day (Thursday) I got to Tomintoul,[1] where I slept, a wild and moorland village. Next day was the annual market, and it rained incessantly. My adventures there I will give you afterwards, and they were not to my discredit. On Saturday morning (still most rainy) I proceeded to Grantown, fourteen miles, where I arrived at night, and slept comfortably; the country most wild and desolate. About five miles from this live the Miss Grants of Lifforchy. Thither on Sunday morning I repaired, and found them all at home and well, with a brother lately arrived from the East Indies. On Monday morning at three o'clock, he and I started to the top of Cairngorm, one of the highest mountains in Scotland, and returned at eight o'clock in the evening; I tired, and he sick even unto death. On Tuesday morning, I left the house, and walked on towards Inverness, to a place called Craga, distance twenty-seven miles. It rained incessantly, and I had both toothache and earache. On Wednesday morning I started from Craga, and this same Wednesday reached Millbank, Mr. M'Kenzie's house, from which I now write after a walk of twenty-five miles. So much then for a general sketch, which I will fill up when I am once more with you.

[1] Of this place he says in the *Noctes*:—"Drinking, dancing, swearing, and quarrelling going on all the time in Tomintoul, James, for a fair there is a wild rendezvous, as we both know, summer and winter; and thither flock the wildest spirits of the wildest clans."

"I find from your letter that our sweet ones are all unwell, and likely to be so. That last letter was dated Friday, August 8th. I am miserable about them. To-morrow, that is, Thursday, August 14th, and that one day, I must rest here, for the fatigue I have lately undergone has been beyond anything I ever experienced. On Friday the 15th, I shall start again, and hope to be at Achlian, Dugald Campbell's, by Inverary, in a week from that time. So *immediately* on receiving this, which I think will be on Saturday 16th, write to me to that direction. Say you write on the day after you receive mine, whatever that day may be, and I will immediately write you on my arrival there; I will lose no time in getting there, and I think in about a fortnight I shall see you. I trust in God the accounts will be good when I reach Achlian. But to that point I will go as soon as I can. I have undergone great fatigue, and much bad weather, and long for your kind bosom, so help me God! Inverary is nearly 150 miles from this, and no carriages, so I must walk all the way. Once more, I pray to God to take care of our beloved children, and to make them well to us. To take a chance of hearing from you, write one line to Post-Office, Fort-William, the moment you receive this, telling me about the children. But write as above mentioned to Achlian, as I may be at Fort-William before your letter reaches. In short, I will go to Achlian as soon as possible, and from your letter there will judge if I am instantly to return home. No delay will take place. I am most anxious about the children. God bless you! and may the Almighty recover

to us all our sweet ones! The chicken-pox is not a bad complaint, so we need not fear; poor Johnny fainting! But they are all dear.—So farewell, yours tenderly, JOHN WILSON."

The adventures of which he says "they were not to my discredit," were doubtless made known to Mrs. Wilson, but never came to the ears of the younger generation, being considered either too trivial, or after many years forgotten. They were not forgotten, however, in the North, for in a recent letter from Mr. Alexander M'Kenzie, Dingwall, this very adventure is thus narrated :—

"I am the person specially honoured by that visit. Mr. Wilson came to me (then living at Millbank near Dingwall) in such peculiar circumstances as leads me to think he would have made some memoranda about it. He had been fishing in the Dee, and by accident came to a fair at Tomintoul, where he saw a poor man much oppressed and ill-used by another, who was considered the bully of the country, and whose name, I think, he said, was Grant. Circumstances led to Mr. Wilson putting off his coat, and giving this fellow a thrashing, but on picking up the coat he found it rifled of his pocket-book, containing all his money but a very few shillings! In this state he left for Carrbridge, where he passed the night without more than enough of refreshment. In the morning he left for Inverness, and calling at the Post-Office he found many letters to his address; but not having money to pay the postage, the person in charge

declined trusting him! He then crossed Kessock Ferry with only a few pence, and arrived at Dingwall about midday, where I happened to be at the time, and was quite overjoyed at seeing him. He was dressed in white duck-trowsers covered with mud, and his white hat entirely so with fishing gear!

"As he proceeded to my house, distant about a mile, he shortly detailed his late adventure, and said he was almost famished. My first work was to send to Inverness for his letters, after which we enjoyed one of the most delightful evenings of my life. He kindly rested himself for several days, and I accompanied him through the most romantic and impassable parts of the country to Kintail, where I parted with him in the house of a worthy mutual friend, George Laidlaw.

"In our rambles, which included some curious incidents, and which occupied several days, he fished wherever a loch or stream presented itself. We avoided all *roads* entirely, and lived with the shepherds."

Such stories as these might, to a certain extent, justify that excellent old lady, Mrs. Grant of Laggan, in making the following observations, when in writing to a friend she burst forth upon the eccentricities of the young poet:—

"Did I ever tell you of one of the said poets we have in town here—indeed one of our intimates—the most provoking creature imaginable! He is young, handsome, witty; has great learning, exuberant spirits, a wife and children that he doats on (circumstances one would think consolidating), and no vice that I know of, but on the contrary, virtuous principles and

feelings. Yet his wonderful eccentricity would put anybody but his wife wild. She, I am convinced, was actually made on purpose for her husband, and has that kind of indescribable controlling influence over him that Catherine is said to have had over that wonderful savage the Czar Peter.

"Pray look at the last *Edinburgh Review;* and read the favourable article on John Wilson's 'City of the Plague.' He is the person in question."

In the month of September he again visited Elleray, accompanied by the eldest of his little girls. On his way he wrote to his wife:—

"PENRITH, *Friday, September 20th, Evening, Nine o'clock*, 1816.

"DEAREST JANE,—We got safely to Hawick about ten o'clock; found a comfortable room and fire; supped and went to bed. Maggy and Mary Topham[1] drank tea at the fireside in the same room with us, and were in bed by eleven. Maggy stood her journey well; made observations on the moon, and frightened me with the beast several times. We left Hawick in a chaise at ten next morning, and proceeded to Knox's, where we dined. We left that by eight o'clock, and reached Longtown by eleven.

"I supped the ladies, and bedded them in half an hour. We left Longtown after breakfast, at ten o'clock; came through Carlisle, and dined at five o'clock. Maggy drank tea at seven, and immediately after retired to bed with Mary Topham, and I believe they are both sound asleep at this moment.

[1] Nursery-maid.

"To-morrow morning at six o'clock we leave this for Patterdale, and I think most probably will remain all night at Bowness. On Sunday will reach Hollow Oak to dinner. Nothing can excel Maggy's behaviour—she is perfect; all eyes that looked on her loved her, and Miss Knox, I understand from Mary Topham, cut off a lock of her hair to keep. Merit is sure of being discovered at last.

"She has sat on my knee almost the whole way, and I feel I love her better than ever I did before. She will be an angelic being like her gentle mother. I will write from Hollow Oak on Monday, so you will hear on Tuesday or Wednesday. Write to me on Tuesday, care of Mrs. Ullock, Bowness.

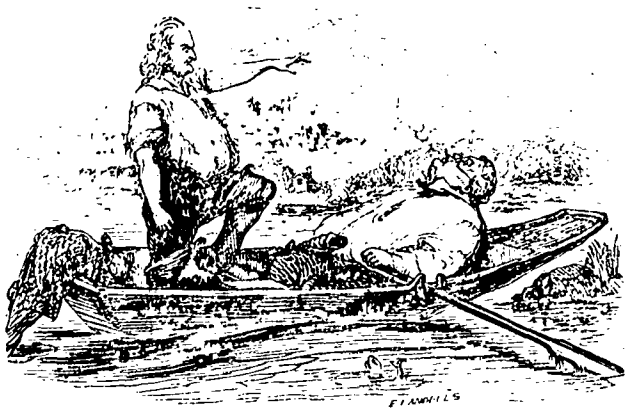
"Give me all family and other news. Love Johnny for my sake, and teach him some prayers and hymns before I return.—Thy affectionate husband,

"JOHN WILSON."

In another letter a few days later, dated from Elleray, he gives rapid notes of his doings; how he attended a ball which was "most dull, though it gave universal satisfaction;" how next day he "lay in bed all day," and the next "crowed all day like a cock at Elleray, to Robertson's[1] infinite delight;" "the next day De

[1] His friend Patrick, afterwards Lord Robertson, one of the most witty and warm-hearted of men. He was born in 1793; called to the Scotch bar in 1815; elected Dean of Faculty in 1842; raised to the bench in 1843; died in 1855. Lockhart wrote many a rhyming epitaph upon him, one of which is quoted elsewhere. On another occasion, he is reported to have written, "Peter Robertson is 'a man,'" to use his own favourite quotation, "cast in Nature's amplest mould. He is admitted

Quincey and William Garnet dined with me here, Billy and Mrs. Balmer officiating." He adds, "Party here very agreeable," which one can well believe. "To-morrow," he goes on, "Garnet, Robertson, and self take coach to Keswick, and thence proceed to Buttermere and Ennerdale. I will write thee on Saturday, fixing my day of return. I go to Ulverstone to see Maggy,



The Professor and Patrick Robertson.

etc. Don't hire a servant, without seeing and approving her—mind that. Write me on Saturday as

to be the greatest corporation lawyer at the Scotch bar; and he is a vast poet as well as a great lawyer. Silence, gentlemen, for a song by Peter Robertson:—

"Come listen all good gentlemen of every degree;
Come listen all ye lady-birds, come listen unto me;
Come listen all you laughing ones, come listen all ye grave;
Come listen all and every one, while I do sing a stave.

"One morning, I remember me, as I did lay in bed,
I felt a strange sensation come a throbbing through my head;
And I thought unto myself, thinks I, Where was it I did dine?
With whom? Oh, I recall the name,—'twas Baron Brandywine.

before. Put Elleray on the letter, else a surgeon at Bowness will read it. Love to Ung[1] and others.—Eternally yours, J. W."

From the excursion with Garnet and Robertson he

"Let me see: Oh, after turtle we had punch, the spirits' rain,
And, if I'm not mistaken, we had iced hock and champagne,
And sundry little sundries, all which go to make one merry,
An intervening toss, or so, of some superb old sherry.

"Well, then, to be dramatic, we must needs imbibe a dram
(A very sorry sort of pun—the perpetrator Sam);
And then to port and claret with great industry we fell,
Which, sooth to say, appeared to suit our party pretty well.

"Then biscuits all bedevilled we designedly did munch,
To gain a proper relish for that glorious bowl of punch,
But after that I cannot say that I remember much,
Except a hiccup-argument 'bout Belgium and the Dutch.

"Such were my recollections, and such I sing to you,
Good gentlemen and lady-birds—upon my soul it's true;
And if you wish to bear away the moral of my song,
It's this – for all your headaches let the reasons still be *strong*."

I think I detect Mr. Lockhart's hand in the following good wishes:—

"Oh, Petrus, Pedro, Peter, which you will,
Long, long thy radiant destiny fulfil,
Bright be thy wit, and bright the golden ore,
Paid down in fees for thy deep legal lore.
Bright be thy claret, brisk be thy champagne,
Thy whisky-punch a vast, exhaustless main,
With thee disporting on its joyous shore,
Of that glad spirit quaffing ever more.
Keen be thy stomach, potent thy digestion,
And long thy lectures on 'the general question,'
While young and old swell out the general strain,
We ne'er shall look upon his like again."

[1] A playful soubriquet for his eldest son.

is hurried back to Elleray on business, and writes in haste :—

"ELLERAY, *Sept. 28th*, 1816.

"MY DEAREST WIFE,—I have not half a minute to spare. Immediately on receiving this, send me the inventory of everything at Elleray. If it is too large to go by post, copy it over in one long sheet, and send it off on Thursday. If it can go by post, write on Tuesday—same day you receive this. On receiving your letter to-morrow, I will write you at length, and tell you when I come home, which will be immediately. It was impossible to leave this hitherto, for reasons I will explain. You will have heard of Maggy since I saw her. I will see her on Wednesday, and tell you all about her. Whatever my anxieties and sorrows are or may be in this life, I have in your affection a happiness paramount to all on earth, and I think that I am happier in the frowns of fortune, with that angelic nature, than perhaps even if we had been living in affluence. God for ever bless you, and my sweet family, is the prayer of your loving and affectionate husband,

"J. WILSON."

There are no more letters or memorials of that year. The next brings us into a new field, which calls for a chapter to itself.

Patrick Robertson, Esq.—From a sketch by the late Professor Edward Forbes.

# CHAPTER VIII.

## LITERATURE—BLACKWOOD'S MAGAZINE.

### 1817-1820.

With the year 1817 we enter on a new epoch in Wilson's life. Hitherto his literary exertions had been confined almost exclusively to poetry; and the reception of his works, however favourable, had not been such as to satisfy him that that was the department in which he was destined to assert his superiority, or to find full scope for his varied powers. Much as has been said as to the mode in which these were exercised, and the comparative inadequacy of the results, I cannot but think that there is misconception on the subject. I dismiss the question what he or any other man of great powers *ought* to have done: I look simply at what he *did* do, which alone concerns us, now that his work is finished. Whether he might or should have written certain works on certain subjects, for the use or pleasure of his own generation and of posterity, seems to me an idle question. Enough for his vindication, that in a long and laborious literary life he wielded a wholesome and powerful influence in the world of letters; and enough for his fame, that amid the haste and exigencies of incessant periodical composition, he wrote such things as no other man but himself could have written, and

which will be read and delighted in as long as the highest kind of criticism and of prose-poetry are valued among men. Periodical literature, it seems to me, was precisely the thing for which he was suited by temperament, versatility, and power; and unless it be broadly asserted, that the service done to letters and civilisation through the medium of a great literary organ is unimportant, and unworthy of the efforts of a man of genius, I do not see how it can be maintained that Professor Wilson neglected or threw away his gifts when he devoted them to the establishment and maintenance of the influence of *Blackwood's Magazine.*

Before, however, entering on the less peaceful events which follow, let us have a glimpse of him once more—rod in hand, and knapsack on back—away in the heart of the Highlands towards the close of July 1817. This time, however, he was burdened with a new load, for he carried besides his wardrobe and fishing-basket, a parcel of books. He had, in fact, come bound to produce an "article" for the *Edinburgh Monthly Magazine,* and that inexorable familiar the printer's devil followed on his heels even into the wilds of Rannoch. There he finished for the August number of that magazine a review of "Lalla Rookh," of which the first part had appeared in June. The following letter is the only memorial of this expedition:—

"MY DEAREST JANE,—On Monday at four o'clock I got to Perth, and during the journey felt much for poor Robert, who must have got dreadfully wet. We dined comfortably there, and walked to Dunkeld in the evening on foot, a very pleasant walk after the rain. On

Tuesday, we took the top of the coach to Pitlochry, thirteen miles from Dunkeld, and about six from the bridge, where we got into the coach from Mrs. Izett's. We thence walked by the river Tummel (a scene somewhat like Borrowdale) to an inn at the head of Loch Tummel, where we stayed all night. On Wednesday, we fished up to Kinloch Rannoch, and I killed forty good trouts. I found our worthy friends here in good health and spirits. They have had two children since we saw them, and they inquired very kindly for you. On Thursday, I fished down to Mount Alexander, but the day was cold and unfavourable. Mr. Stewart of Inverhadden dined with us at the inn—a rare original. I fear I did not go to bed sober. (*Friday.*)—I have breakfasted with him, and fished; good sport, though, as usual, I lost several large ones. Menzies and his friend left me to-day for Loch Ericht, and I expect to see no more of them. To-morrow I ought to leave this, but that confounded Lalla Rookh is still on my hands; so I shall review it to-morrow, leave it here, and be off to Blair Athole on Sunday. On Monday, I shall be at Captain Harden's, Altnagoich, Braemar, and hope on Wednesday to have good accounts of my sweet girl and the fry. After that my motions are uncertain, but on Sunday evening write to 'Mr. Wilson, Post-office, Inverness, to lie till called for,' and I hope to be there as soon as the letter. That is the second Sunday after my departure. No mistakes now. Write long and witty letters. The weather has been tolerable, and I am in good health. Give my love to Ung and the others, and God in his mercy keep them all well and happy.

Heaven bless you for ever, and believe me thy loving and grateful husband.

"KINLOCH RANNOCH, *July* 27, 1817."

Here also may come in two pleasant letters from Jeffrey, before we arrive at the point when it became impossible for the editor of the *Edinburgh Review* to exchange confidential and friendly communications with an acknowledged contributor to *Blackwood*:—

"CRAIGCROOK, 10*th October* 1817.

"MY DEAR WILSON,—Do you think you could be prevailed on to write a review for me now and then? Perhaps this may appear to you a very audacious request, and I am not sure that I should have had the boldness to make it, but I had heard it surmised, and in very intelligent quarters, that you had occasionally condescended to exercise the functions of a critic in works where your exertions must necessarily obtain less celebrity than in our journal. When I apply for assistance to persons in whose talents and judgment I have as much confidence as I have in yours, I leave of course the choice of their subjects very much to themselves, being satisfied that it must always be for my interest to receive all they are most desirous of sending. It is therefore rather with a view to tempt than to assist you, that I venture to suggest to you a general review of our dramatic poetry, a subject which I long meditated for myself, but which I now feel that I shall never have leisure to treat as I should wish to treat it, and upon which indeed I could not now enter, without a pretty laborious resumption of my early and half-forgotten

studies. To you, I am quite sure, it is familiar, and while I am by no means certain that our opinions could always coincide, I have no hesitation in saying, that I should very much distrust my own when they were in absolute opposition to yours, and that I am unfeignedly of opinion that in your hands the disquisition will be more edifying and quite as entertaining as ever it could have been in mine. It is the appearance of the weak and dull article in the last *Quarterly*, which has roused me to the resolution of procuring something more worthy of the subject for the *Edinburgh*, and there really is nobody but yourself to whom I can look with any satisfaction for such a paper.

"I do not want, as you will easily conjecture, a learned, ostentatious, and antiquarian dissertation, but an account written with taste and feeling, and garnished, if you please, with such quotations as may be either very curious or very delightful. I intended something of this sort when I began my review of Ford's plays, but I ran off the course almost at the starting, and could never get back again.

"Now, pray, do not refuse me rashly. I am not without impatience for your answer, but I would rather not have it for a day or two, if your first impression is that it would be unfavourable. If you are in a complying mood, the sooner I hear it the better.

"Independent of all this, will you allow me again to say, that I am very sincerely desirous of being better acquainted with you, and regret very much that my many avocations and irregular way of life have forced me to see so little of you. Could you venture to dine

here without a party any day next week that you choose to name, except Saturday? If you have no engagement, will you come on Monday or Tuesday? Any other day that may be more convenient. If you take my proposal into kind consideration, we may talk a little of the drama; if not, we will fall on something else.—Believe me always very faithfully yours,

"F. JEFFREY.

"Send your answer to George Street."

The fact that my father agreed to contribute to an organ which soon after became the object of determined hostility in the periodical to which he chiefly devoted his services, will not, I imagine, be now regarded in the same light as it was by the Edinburgh Whigs of 1817. The practice of writing on different subjects in organs of the most hostile opinions is one which is now so universal among men of the highest character in the world of letters, that it needs no vindication here. At the time, too, when my father received this friendly overture from Jeffrey, the Magazine had not assumed that position as a representative of high Tory principles which by and by placed it in direct antagonism to the Review. The subjects on which he agreed to contribute were purely literary, and he was, no doubt, very glad to get the opportunity of expressing his views on poetry in an organ where that subject had not been treated in a style which he could consider satisfactory. It would appear that he had offered to review Coleridge in a friendly manner, which, taken in connexion with the fact that a fierce onslaught on that

poet appeared in the Number of *Blackwood* at that very time in the press, may furnish matter for unfavourable judgment to any sympathizers in the angry feelings of that period. I have no fear, however, that this circumstance will lead to uncharitable conclusions in the minds of any whose opinion I value. I am content to risk the reader's estimate of my father's generosity and kindliness of nature on the real facts of his life, without keeping anything in the background that throws light upon them. The following is Jeffrey's reply to his communication, which I regret has not come into my hands:—

"CRAIGCROOK, 17*th October* 1817.

"MY DEAR WILSON,—I give you up Byron freely, and thankfully accept of your conditional promise about the drama; for Coleridge, I should like first to have a little talk with you. I had intended to review him fairly, and, if possible, favourably, myself, at all events mercifully; but, on looking into the volume, I can discern so little new, and so much less good than I had expected, that I hesitate about noticing him at all. I cannot help fearing, too, that the discrepancy of our opinions as to *that* style of poetry may be too glaring to render it prudent to venture upon it, at least under existing circumstances; and besides, if I must unmask all my weakness to you, I am a little desirous of having the credit, though it should only be an inward one, of doing a handsome or even kind thing to a man who has spoken ill of me, and am unwilling that a favourable review of this author should appear in the *Review* from any other hand than my own. But we shall talk of

this after I have considered the capabilities of the work a little further.

"I am very much gratified by the kind things you are pleased to say of me, though the flattering ones with which you have mixed them rather disturb me. When you know me a little better, you will find me a very ordinary fellow, and really not half so vain as to take your testimony in behalf of my qualifications. I have, I suppose, a little more practice and expertness in some things than you can yet have, but I am very much mistaken if you have not more talent of every kind than I have. What I think of your character you may infer from the offer I have made you of my friendship, and which I rather think I never made to any other man.

"I think you have a kind heart and a manly spirit, and feel perfectly assured that you will always act with frankness, gentleness, and firmness. I ask pardon for sending you this certificate, but I do not know how else to express so clearly the grounds of my regard and esteem.

"Believe me always, very faithfully yours,

"F. JEFFREY.

"I hope to see you on your return from Glasgow."

Of the subjects spoken of or contemplated, the only one which he took up was Byron, the review of whom did not make its appearance till August of the following year. That was my father's first and last contribution to the *Edinburgh Review*. Another fragment of a letter from Jeffrey, that must have been written not long after, may also be inserted here for the sake of coherence. It

refers to a vindication of Wordsworth by my father, in reply to a letter in the *Edinburgh Magazine* criticising the poet's strictures on the *Edinburgh Review's* estimate of the character of Burns :—

. . . "hear that you had anything to do with it, and was so far from feeling any animosity to the author that I conceived a very favourable opinion of him. I have not had an opportunity of looking into it since I saw your letter, but I can most confidently assure you that nothing that is there said can break any squares between us, and that you may praise Wordsworth as much as you please, and vilipend my criticisms on him in the most sweeping manner without giving me a moment's uneasiness or offence, provided you do not call me a slanderer, and an idiot, and a puppy, and all the other fine names that that worthy and judicious person has thought fit to lavish on me. I fairly tell you that I think your veneration for that gentleman is a sort of infatuation, but in you it is an amiable one, and I should think meanly of myself indeed if I were to take exception at a man for admiring the poetry or the speculative opinions of an author who, having had some provocation, has been ridiculously unjust to me. One thing I am struck with as a wilful blindness and partiality in the paper in question, and that was your passing over entirely the remarkable fact of the said W— saying little or nothing of the blasphemies against Burns which occur in the *Quarterly*, and which are far more violent and offensive than mine, and pouring out all the vials of his wrath at the *Edinburgh*, which had given him much less provocation. Is it possible for you in your

conscience to believe after this that the tirade against the *Edinburgh* critic was dictated by a pure, generous resentment for the injuries done to Burns, and not by a little vindictive feeling for the severities practised on himself? By the way, I think I am *nearly* right in what I have said of Burns; that is, I think the doctrine and morality to which I object is far oftener inculcated in his writings than any other, and is plainly most familiar to his thoughts, though perhaps it was ungenerous to denounce it so strongly.

"I have not written so long a letter these three years. Pray let me hear that you are writing a review of Lord B—— for me in peace and felicity, and that you have resolved to dirty your fingers no more with the quarrels of magazines and booksellers. God bless you!—Very truly yours, F. JEFFREY."

My father's connexion with *Blackwood's Magazine* was such as to make it absolutely necessary, in any record of his life, to give some account of the rise of this periodical, and of the circumstances which led to his becoming so intimately associated with its history. I shall endeavour to do so as briefly as I can. Fortunately we are now sufficiently removed by time from the controversies of those exciting days, to look at them with perfect calmness, if not impartiality; with something of wonder it may be, at the fierceness displayed in contests about things which, in our own more peaceful times, are treated with at least the affectation of philosophic indifference; but also, with some admiration of the vigour manifested in supporting what was heartily be

lieved. It is indeed impossible for us at this time to realize fully the state of feeling that prevailed in the literature and politics of the years between 1810 and 1830. We can hardly imagine why men, who at heart respected and liked each other, should have found it necessary to hold no communion, but, on the contrary, to wage bitter war because the one was an admirer of the Prince Regent and Lord Castlereagh, the other a supporter of Queen Caroline and Mr. Brougham. We cannot conceive why a poet should be stigmatized as a base and detestable character, merely because he was a Cockney and a Radical; nor can we comprehend how gentlemen, aggrieved by articles in newspapers or magazines, should have thought it necessary to the vindication of their honour, to horsewhip or shoot the printers or editors of the publications in which such articles appeared. Yet in 1817, and the following years, we find such to have been the state of things in the capital of Scotland. Not only was society actually less civilized; but politics, which now happily forms no barrier between men of otherwise congenial minds, then constituted the one great line of demarcation. You were either a Tory and a good man, or a Whig and a rascal, and *vice versa*. If you were a Tory, and wanted a place, it was the duty of all good Tories to stand by you; if you were a Whig, your chance was small; but its feebleness was all the more reason why you should be proclaimed a martyr, and all your opponents profligate mercenaries. If I exaggerate, I am open to correction; but such appears to me to have been the prevailing tone among the men who

figured most actively in public life about the time to which this chapter relates. In literature, at that time, the *Edinburgh Review* was supreme. Its doctrines were received, among those who believed in them, as oracular; and in the hands of the small retailers of political and literary dogmas who swore by it, these were becoming insufferably tiresome to the Tory part of mankind, who, singularly enough, had no literary oracle of their own north of the Tweed. I suppose the party being strong in power did not feel the want of such influence. The more ardent and active minds on that side, however, were naturally impatient of the dictatorship exercised by Mr. Jeffrey, and wanted only opportunity to establish an opposing force in the interests of their own venerable creed. That opportunity came, and was vigorously used, too vigorously at first, sometimes cruelly and unjustly, but ultimately with results eminently beneficial.

To begin then at the beginning. In the month of December 1816, Mr. William Blackwood, who had by uncommon tact and energy, established his character in the course of a few years as an enterprising publisher in Edinburgh, was applied to by two literary men to become the publisher of a new monthly magazine, which they had projected.[1] These gentlemen were James Cleghorn,[2] who had acquired some literary posi-

[1] Mr. Gillies in his Memoirs gives the credit of the origin and suggestion to Hogg.—Vol. i. p. 230.

[2] Mr. Cleghorn was more fortunate in his financial than his literary undertakings, having been the founder of the Scottish Provident Institution, by whom a monument to his memory has been erected in the Edinburgh Warriston Cemetery. He died in May 1838.

tion as editor of a *Farmers' Magazine*, and Thomas Pringle,[1] a pleasant writer and poet, who afterwards emigrated to South Africa.[2] The idea was good, and the time fitting, for the "felt want," which is now pleaded about once a week as the ground for establishing some new journal, was then a serious reality. The only periodical in Edinburgh of any mark besides the *Review* being the *Scots Magazine*, published by Constable, once a highly respectable, but at that time a vapid and almost "doited" publication. Messrs. Cleghorn and Pringle had secured the co-operation of several clever writers,—among others, Mr. R. P. Gillies, and James Hogg,—and Mr. Blackwood's sagacious eye at once discerned the elements of success in the project. The arrangements were accordingly proceeded with, on the footing that the publisher and the editors were to be joint proprietors, and share the profits, if any. The first number appeared in April 1817, under the title of *The Edinburgh Monthly Magazine*. The contents were varied and agreeable, but no way remarkable; and a prefatory note to the next number, in which the editors spoke of "Our humble Miscellany," indicates a certain mediocrity of aim which must have been distasteful to the aspiring energy of the publisher, who had very different views of what the Magazine ought to be made. There was no definite arrangement for

[1] Author of *Narrative of a Residence in South Africa*, *Ephemerides*, etc.; born 1789, died 1834.

[2] By a curious coincidence both these gentlemen were lame, and went on crutches, an infirmity to which ludicrous but most improper allusion is made in the Chaldee MS., where they are described as coming in "skipping on staves."

the payment of contributors. In fact it seems to have been taken for granted that contributions were to be supplied on the most moderate terms, if not altogether gratuitously. I find Mr. Blackwood stating in his subsequent vindication of himself, in reply to the charge of having supplied no money to the editors, that during the six months of their connexion, he "had paid them different sums, amounting to £50." He adds, "They will tell you I never refused them any money they applied for. They may perhaps say the money was for contributors; but to this moment I am utterly ignorant of any contributors to whom they either have or were called upon to pay money, excepting some very trifling sums to two individuals."[1] Perhaps this fact may have something to do with the crisis that soon occurred in the management of the Magazine; at all events, it had not gone beyond two numbers, when editors and publisher found they could not work together. Mr. Pringle was a very amiable man, but his brother editor was a less agreeable person, and with an estimate of his own literary powers considerably higher than that entertained by his sagacious publisher. On the 19th of May the co-editors formally wrote to Mr. Blackwood, letting him know that his interference with their editorial functions could no longer be endured. Mr. Blackwood was probably nothing loath to receive such an intimation, and in the exercise of his rights as partner

[1] This economical style of work contrasts curiously with the munificence subsequently practised in connexion with the Magazine. A few years after this, I find Wilson informing a contributor, "Our pay is ten guineas a sheet," a rate since that time nearly doubled.

and publisher, advertised in the June number of the Magazine that its publication would be discontinued at the end of three months from that date. The editors, thrown adrift by this *coup*, immediately offered their services to Messrs. Constable and Co., as editors of a new series of the *Scots Magazine*, to appear under the title of *The Edinburgh Magazine*; while Mr. Blackwood, after some contention and correspondence, agreed to pay his quondam partners £125 for their share in the copyright of the *Edinburgh Monthly Magazine*.[1] In acquiring the copyright of the Magazine, Mr. Blackwood determined to abandon its old title, and give it a name combining the double advantage that it would not be confounded with any other, and would at the same time help to spread the reputation of the publisher.

Accordingly in October 1817, appeared for the first time *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (No. VII. from commencement), and it needed no advertising trumpet to let the world know that a new reign (a reign of terror in its way) had begun. In the previous six numbers there had been nothing allowed to creep in that could possibly

[1] The sum they had demanded was £300, but according to the publisher's accounts, submitted to the law-agent of the editors, the success of the work had not been such as to justify that estimate. The accounts showed that so far from having made profit, the publisher was nearly £140 out of pocket, and that, "even if the whole impression were sold off, there would not be £70 of clear profit." According to this estimate, which seems to have satisfied the agent (no other than the afterwards celebrated George Combe), the half share of the editors at the most would have been worth £35. What the number of copies printed was I have no means of knowing; it was, probably, not large, and the fact that the whole impression was not disposed of, gives some ground for the belief that the publisher had reason to be dissatisfied with the management.

offend the most zealous partisan of the Blue and Yellow. On the contrary, the opening article of No. I was a good-natured eulogium on Mr. Francis Horner; the *Edinburgh Review* was praised for its ability, moderation, and good taste; politics were rather eschewed than otherwise; the literary notices were, with one or two exceptions, elaborately commonplace and complaisant, and, in fact, everything was exemplarily careful, correct, and colourless. No VII. spoke a different language, and proclaimed a new and sterner creed. Among a considerable variety of papers, most of them able and interesting, it contained not less than three of a kind well calculated to arouse curiosity and excitement, and to give deep offence to sections more or less extensive of the reading public. The first was a most unwarrantable assault on Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, which was adjudged to be a "most execrable" performance, and its author a miserable compound of "egotism and malignity."[1] The second was an even more unjustifiable attack on Leigh Hunt, who was spoken of as a "profligate creature," a person "without reverence either for God or man." The third was the famous "Chaldee Manuscript," compared with which the sins of the others were almost pardonable in the eyes of a great portion of the public. The effect of this article upon the small society of Edinburgh can now hardly be realized.[2]

[1] It is edifying to find this article criticised thus in "Peter's Letters" two years afterwards:—"This is indeed the only one of all the various sins of the Magazine for which I am at a loss to discover not an apology but a motive. . . . The result is bad, and, in truth, very pitiable."

[2] It is unnecessary here to give any account of this singular *jeu d'esprit*,

It was evident, in a word, that a new and very formidable power had come into existence, and that those who wielded it, whoever they were, were not men to stick at trifles. The sensation produced by the first number was kept up in those that followed. There was hardly a number for many months that did not contain at least one attack upon somebody, and the business was gone about with a systematic determination that showed there was an ample store of the same ammunition in reserve. Most people, however virtuous, have a kind of malicious pleasure in seeing others sacrificed, if the process be artistically gone about, and the *Blackwood* tomahawkers were undeniable adepts in the art. Even those who most condemned them, accordingly showed their appreciation of their performances by reading and talking of them, which was exactly the thing to increase their influence. It must not be imagined, however, that the staple of *Blackwood's* contributions consisted of mere banter and personality. These would have excited but slight and temporary notice had the bulk of the articles not displayed a rare combination of much higher qualities. Whatever subjects were discussed, were handled with a masterly vigour and freshness, and developed a fulness of knowledge and variety of talent

the history of which will be found sufficiently detailed in Professor Ferrier's excellent Preface to it, in vol. iv. of Wilson's *Works*. I may add this fact only, that it was composed in 53 Queen Street, amid shouts of laughter, that made the ladies in the room above send to inquire, in wonder, what the gentlemen below were about. I am informed that among those who were met together on that memorable occasion was Sir William Hamilton, who also exercised his wit in writing a verse, and was so amused by his own performance that he tumbled off his chair in a fit of laughter.

that could not fail to command respect even from the least approving critic. The publisher knew too well what suited the public taste, and had too much innate sense and fairness to allow more than a reasonable modicum of abuse in the pages of his Magazine. But he had a difficult task in accommodating the inclinations of his fiery associates to the dictates of prudence and justice; appreciating highly, as he did, their remarkable talents, and unwilling to lose their services, it required great tact and firmness to restrain their sharp pens, and he more than once paid dearly, in solid cash, for their wanton and immoderate expressions.[1]

The public, whether pleased or angry, inquired with wonder where all this sudden talent had lain hid that now threatened to set the Forth on fire. Suspicions were rife; but Mr. Blackwood could keep a secret, and knew the power of mystery. Who his contributors were,

[1] The early defects of the Magazine are nowhere better analysed than by the very hands that were chiefly engaged in the work. The authors of "Peter's Letters," after pointing out the faults of the *Edinburgh Review*, go on to say, "These faults—faults thus at last beginning to be seen by a considerable number of the old readers and admirers of the *Edinburgh Review*—seem to have been at the bottom of the aversion which the writers who established *Blackwood's Magazine* had against it; but their quarrel also included a very just disapprobation of the unpatriotic mode of considering the political events of the times adopted all along by the *Review*, and also of its occasional irreligious mockeries, borrowed from the French philosophy, or *soi-disant* philosophy of the last age. Their great object seems to have been to break up the monopoly of influence which had long been possessed by a set of persons guilty of perverting, in so many ways, talents on all hands acknowledged to be great. And had they gone about the execution of their design with as much candour and good feeling as would seem to have attended the conception of it, I have little doubt they would very soon have procured a mighty host of readers to go along with them in all their conclusions. But the persons who are supposed to have

who his editor, were matters on which neither he nor they chose to give more information than was necessary. It might suffice for the public to know from the allegorical descriptions of the Chaldee MS., that there was a host of mighty creatures in the service of the "man in plain apparel," conspicuous among which were the "beautiful Leopard from the valley of the Palm trees," and "the Scorpion which delighteth to sting the faces of men." As for their leader, he was judiciously represented as a veiled personage, whose name it was in vain to ask, and whose personality was itself a mystery. On that point the public, which cannot rest satisfied without attributing specific powers to specific persons, refused after a time to acknowledge the mystery, and insisted on recognising in John Wilson the real impersonation of Blackwood's "veiled editor." The error has been often emphatically corrected: let it once again be

taken the lead in directing the new forces, wanted many of those qualities which were most necessary to insure success to their endeavours; and they possessed others which, although in themselves admirably fitted for enabling them to conduct their project successfully, tended, in the manner in which they made use of them, to throw many unnecessary obstacles in their way. In short, they were very young, or very inexperienced men, who, although passionately fond of literature, and even well skilled in many of its finest branches, were by no means accurately acquainted with the structure and practice of literature as it exists at this day in Britain. . . . They approached the lists of literary warfare with the spirit at bottom of true knights; but they had come from the woods and the cloisters, and not from the cities and haunts of active men, and they had armed themselves, in addition to their weapons of the right temper, with many other weapons of offence, which, although sanctioned in former times by the practice of the heroes in whose repositories they had found them rusting, had now become utterly exploded, and were regarded, and justly regarded, as entirely unjustifiable and disgraceful by all who surveyed with modern eyes the arena of their exertions."

Mr. Wilson, *alias* "The Leopard."

Mr. Lockhart, *alias* "The Scorpion."

repeated, on the best authority, that the only real editor *Blackwood's Magazine* ever had was Blackwood himself. Of this fact I have abundant proofs. Suffice it that contributions from Wilson's own pen have been altered, cut down, and kept back, in compliance with the strong will of the man whose name on the title-page of the Magazine truly indicated with whom lay the sole responsibility of the management.

At what precise date my father came into personal communication with Mr. Blackwood does not appear. Before that, however, he had been an anonymous contributor to the Magazine. In the very first number is a poem entitled, "The Desolate Village, a Reverie," with the initial N, which bears strong marks of his style. Some others, similarly signed, and of similar qualities, occur in subsequent numbers. In the Notices to Correspondents in No. II., it is stated that the "Letter on the proposed new translation of the Psalms" was too late for insertion. That letter, which did not appear, is referred to in the following note, without date or signature, in my father's handwriting: –

"SIR,—I enclose a letter for your Magazine from the same anonymous writer who sent you a communication relative to a new translation of the Psalms. If these communications are inserted, and I feel some confidence that they are fitted for a work like the Edinburgh Magazine, I shall take care to send you some little trifle every month. But I prefer remaining anonymous at present, till I see how my communications are appreciated."

How the monthly trifles were appreciated by Mr.

Blackwood's two editors matters not; that they were appreciated by that gentleman himself soon became apparent. Probably enough some of the anonymous correspondent's contributions gave rise to those differences of opinion between the publisher and the editors, which ended in their separation. One cannot but suspect that the writer of the paper referred to in the following "Notice to a correspondent" was either the Leopard or the Scorpion:—"The paper on Craniology by Peter Candid would have appeared in our present number, if it had not contained some improper personal allusions." In the same number (III.), at all events, is a review of "The Craniad," a Poem, which may be given entire.[1] I have no doubt the cautious editors inserted it with great misgivings as to its containing "improper personal allusions;" very possibly the publisher inserted it without consulting them. It is one of the very few lively things in the *Edinburgh Monthly Magazine.*

In the new Magazine, relieved from the editorial incubus, and the embarrassments of a divided responsibility, the genius of Wilson found free scope. Like a strong athlete who never before had room or occasion to display his powers, he now revelled in their exercise

[1] *The Craniad, or Spurzheim Illustrated.* A Poem in Two Parts. 12mo. Blackwood. Edinburgh, 1817. "The Craniad is the worst poem we have now in Scotland. The author has it in his power at once to decide the great craniological controversy. Let him submit his skull to general inspection, and if it exhibit a single intellectual organ, Spurzheim's theory is overthrown." The original of this characteristic bit of criticism occurs in a MS. book, described by Mr. Gillies as an "enormous ledger," which, he says, was taken possession of by my father, and filled with "skeletons" of proposed articles. Of these sketches, however, the much mutilated volume contains none, the existing contents being almost entirely poetry.

in an arena where the competitors were abundant, and the onlookers eagerly interested. Month after month he poured forth the exuberant current of his ideas on politics, poetry, philosophy, religion, art, books, men, and nature, with a freshness and force that seemed incapable of exhaustion, and regardless of obstacles. It was in fact only a change in the form of his activity. In that new and more exciting field he doubtless dealt many a blow, of which, on calm reflection and in maturer years, he saw reason to repent. But without at all excusing the extravagance of censure and the violence of language which often disfigured these early contributions to the Magazine, I cannot say that I have been able to trace to his hand any instance of unmanly attack, or one shade of real malignity. There did appear in the Magazine wanton and unjustifiable strictures on persons such as Wordsworth and Coleridge, with whom he was on terms of friendship, and for whom, in its own pages and elsewhere, he professed, as he sincerely felt, the highest esteem. But when it is well understood that he was never in any sense the editor, and that in these early days of the Magazine the ruling principle seemed to be that every man fought for his own hand, and was surrounded with a cloud of secrecy even from his fellows, it will appear that he had simply the alternative of ceasing to contribute further to the Magazine, or of continuing to do so under the disadvantage of seeming to approve what he really condemned.[1] That he adopted

[1] Thus it is possible his desire to review Coleridge favourably in the *Edinburgh* may have arisen from a wish to do justice to that great man, the opportunity for which was denied in the pages of *Blackwood*.

the latter course is, I think, no stigma on his character; and in after days, when his influence in the Magazine had become paramount, he made noble amends for its former sins.

The staff of contributors whom Mr. Blackwood had contrived to rally round his standard contained many distinguished men. "The Great Unknown," and the venerable "Man of Feeling," were enlisted on his side, and gave some occasional help. Dr. M'Crie the biographer of Knox, and Dr. Andrew Thomson, were solemnly and at much length reproved by an orthodox pamphleteer, styling himself *Calvinus*, for their supposed association with the wicked authors of the Chaldee Manuscript. Sir David Brewster contributed scientific articles, as did also Robert Jameson and James Wilson. Among the other contributors, actual or presumed, were De Quincey, Hogg, Gillies, Fraser Tytler, Kirkpatrick Sharpe, Sir William Hamilton, and his brother, the author of *Cyril Thornton*.[1] But though all these and more figured in the list of Blackwood's supporters, there were but two on whom he placed his main reliance, the most prolific and versatile of all the band, who between them were capable at any time of providing the whole contents of a Number. These were John Wilson and John Gibson Lockhart. Those whose only knowledge of that pair of briefless young advocates was derived from seeing them pacing the Parliament House, or lounging carelessly into Blackwood's saloon to read

[1] Thomas Hamilton wrote several works besides *Cyril Thornton*; among others, *Annals of the Peninsular Campaign*, and *Men and Manners in America*. He died in 1842 at the age of fifty-three.

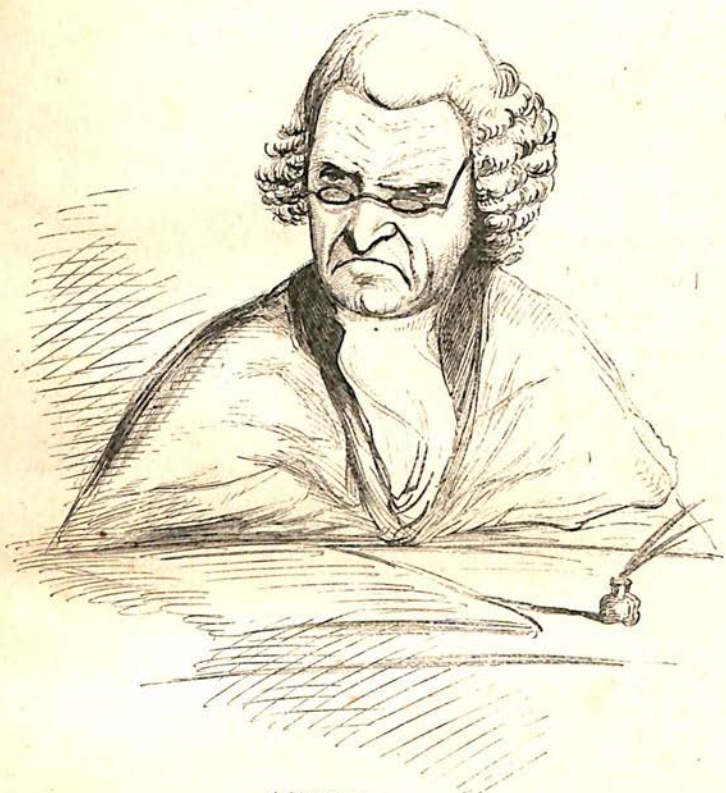
the newspapers,[1] and pass their jokes on everybody, including themselves, could have little idea of their power of work, or of the formidable manner in which it was being exercised. That blue-eyed and ruddy-cheeked poet, whose time seemed to hang lightly enough upon his hands, did not quite realize one's idea of the redoubtable critic whose "crutch" was to become so formidable a weapon. Nor did his jaunty-looking companion, whose leisure seemed to be wholly occupied in drawing caricatures,[2] appear a likely person, when he sauntered home from Princes Street, to sit down to a translation from the German, or to dash off at a

[1] That saloon and its proprietor are thus described by Dr. Peter Morris: —"Then you have an elegant oval saloon lighted from the roof, where various groups of loungers and literary *dilettanti* are engaged in looking at, or criticising among themselves, the publications just arrived by that day's coach from town. In such critical colloquies, the voice of the bookseller may ever and anon be heard mingling the broad and unadulterated notes of its Auld Reekie music; for unless occupied in the recesses of the premises with some other business, it is here that he has his usual station. He is a nimble, active-looking man of middle age, and moves about from one corner to another with great alacrity, and apparently under the influence of high animal spirits. His complexion is very sanguineous, but nothing can be more intelligent, keen, and sagacious than the expression of his whole physiognomy; above all, the grey eyes and eyebrows, as full of locomotion as those of Catalani."—*Peter's Letters*, vol. ii. pp. 187, 188.

[2] It is said, with what truth I know not, that clever as Mr. Lockhart was with both pen and pencil, he lacked curiously one gift without which no man can be a successful barrister; he could not, like many other able writers, make a speech. His portfolios show that, instead of taking notes during a trial, his pen must have been busily employed in photographing all the parties engaged, Judge, counsel, and prisoner. I avail myself of this opportunity to insert here two specimens of his wonderful power, one taken from the Bench, and another from the Pulpit.

A SCOTCH MINISTER.

"When last in Scotland I was advised to look about among the pulpits, to try whether any living specimen could be found resembling the ancient Scottish worthies. I did so, but was not successful."—*Dr. Ulrick Sternstare on the National Character of the Scots.*—*Blackwood*, vol. iv. p. 329.



A SCOTCH JUDGE.

sitting "copy" enough to fill a sheet of *Blackwood's Magazine*. The striking contrast in the outward aspect of the two men corresponded truly to their difference of character and temperament,—a difference, however, which proved no obstacle to their close intimacy. There was a picturesque contrast between them, which might be simply defined by light and shade; but there was a more striking dissimilarity than that which is merely the result of colouring. Mr. Lockhart's pale olive complexion had something of a Spanish character in it, that accorded well with the sombre or rather melancholy expression of his countenance; his thin lips, compressed beneath a smile of habitual sarcasm, promised no genial response to the warmer emotions of the heart. His compact, finely-formed head indicated an acute and refined intellect. Cold, haughty, supercilious in manner, he seldom won love, and not unfrequently caused his friends to distrust it in him, for they sometimes found the warmth of their own feelings thrown back upon them in presence of this cold indifference. Circumstances afterwards conferred on him a brilliant position, and he gave way to the weakness which seeks prestige from the reflected glory found in rank. The gay coteries of London society injured his interest in the old friends who had worked hand in hand with him when in Edinburgh. He was well depicted by his friend through the mouth of the Shepherd, as "the Oxford collegian, wi' a pale face and a black toozy head, but an e'e like an eagle's; and a sort o' lauch about the screwed-up mouth o' him that fules ca'ed no canny, for they couldna' thole the meaning o't." I am

fortunate enough to be able to give the capital likeness on the opposite page, drawn by his own hand, in which the satirist who spared no one, has most assuredly not been flattering to himself.

Wilson's appearance in those days is thus described in *Peter's Letters* by Mr. Lockhart:—"In complexion he is the best specimen I have ever seen of the genuine or ideal *Goth*. His hair is of the true Sicambrian yellow; his eyes are of the brightest, and at the same time of the clearest blue, and the blood glows in his cheek with as firm a fervour as it did, according to the description of Jornandes, in those of the 'Bello gaudentes, prælio ridentes Teutones' of Attila." The black-haired Spanish-looking Oxonian, with that uncanny laugh of his, was a very dangerous person to encounter in the field of letters. "I've sometimes thocht, Mr. North," says the Shepherd, "that ye were a wee feared for him yoursel', and used rather, without kennin't, to draw in your horns." Systematic, cool, and circumspect, when he armed himself for conflict it was with a fell and deadly determination. The other rushed into combat rejoicingly, like the Teutons; but even in his fiercest mood, he was alive to pity, tenderness, and humour. When he impaled a victim, he did it, as Walton recommends, not vindictively, but as if he loved him. Lockhart, on the other hand, though susceptible of deep emotions, and gifted with a most playful wit, had no scruple in wounding to the very quick, and no thrill of compassion ever held back his hand when he had made up his mind to strike. He was certainly no coward, but he liked to fight under

Mr. Gibson Lockhart, *alias* Baron Lauerwinkel, *alias* William Wastle, *alias* Dr. Ulrick Ste nstare, *alias* Dr. Peter Morris, etc., as sketched by himself.

cover, and keep himself unseen, while Wilson, even under the shield of anonymity, was rather prone to exhibit his own unmistakable personality.

Such were the two principal contributors to *Blackwood* when it broke upon the startled gaze of Edinburgh Whigdom, like a fiery comet "that with fear of change perplexes monarchs." Not without reason did the adherents of the "Blue and Yellow" wish ill to the formidable new comer, for apart from its undeniable offences against good feeling and taste, there was a power and life about the Magazine that betokened ominously for the hitherto unchallenged supremacy of the great Review. In spite of its errors, the substantial merits of the Magazine securely established its popularity, and in the course of a few years it became recognised throughout Britain as the most able and interesting periodical work that had ever been published.

In noticing the early contributors, it would not do to pass over Mr. Robert Sym, whose pseudonym of "Timothy Tickler" became as familiar to its readers as that of Christopher North himself. That "noble and genuine old Tory," as the Shepherd calls him, was Wilson's uncle, and in his hospitable house in George Square, *alias* "Southside," the contributors to the Magazine had many a merry gathering. He was a fine-looking, elderly gentleman, of uncommon height and aristocratic bearing, his white hair contrasting strikingly with the youthful freshness of his complexion. "Tickler," says the Shepherd, "is completely an original, as any one may see who has attended to his remarks; for there is no sophistry there; they are

every one his own. Nay, I don't believe that North has, would, or durst put a single sentence into his mouth that had not proceeded out of it. No, no; although I was a scapegoat, no one, and far less a nephew, might do so with Timothy Tickler.[1] His reading, both ancient and modern, is boundless; his taste and perception acute beyond those of other men; his satire keen and biting; but at the same time his good-humour is altogether inexhaustible, save when ignited by coming in collision with Whig or Radical principles. At a certain period of the night our entertainer knew by the longing looks which I cast to a beloved corner of the dining-room what I was wanting; then with 'Oh, I beg your pardon, Hogg, I was forgetting,' he would take out a small gold key, that hung by a chain of the same precious metal to a particular button-hole, and stalk away, as tall as life, open two splendid fiddle-cases, and produce their contents, first the one and then the other, but always keeping the best to himself. I'll never forget with what elated dignity he stood straight up in the middle of that floor and rosined his bow: there was a twist of the lip and an upward beam of the eye that was truly sublime; then down we sat side by side and began. . . . At the end of every tune we took a glass, and still our enthusiastic admiration of the Scottish tunes increased, our energies of execution were redoubled, till ultimately it became, not only a complete and well-contested race, but a trial of strength to determine which should drown the other. The only feelings short of ecstasy that came

[1] But all the papers in *Blackwood* signed "Timothy Tickler" were not written by Mr. Sym, Mr. Hogg notwithstanding.

across us in these enraptured moments were caused by hearing the laugh and joke going on with our friends, as if no such thrilling strains had been flowing. But if Sym's eye chanced to fall on them, it instantly retreated upwards again in mild indignation."[1]

[1] The following epitaph on Tickler, from the *Noctes*, is worthy of extraction :—

"Pray for the soul
Of Timothy Tickler;
For the Church and the bowl
A determinate stickler.

"Born and bred in the land
Where Fyne herrings they munch,
And a capital hand
At concocting of punch.

"From that great bumper school
To Auld Reekie he came,
And drew in a stool
To his desk in the same.

"But, though W.S.,
And ambitious to thrive,
Even his foes must confess
Cheated no man alive.

"Neither harried poor gentry
Of house or of land,
Nor bolted the country
With cash in his hand.

"Where tall as a steeple,
And thin as a shadow,
He towered o'er the people
In the Links or the Meadow.

(*Chorus*)—With a pipe in his cheek,
And a goblet before him,
Every night of the week
In sæcula sæculorum."

Mr. Sym was born in 1750 and died in 1844.

The Shepherd himself was not the least remarkable among that set of remarkable men. In spite of qualities that made it impossible perfectly to respect him, his original genius and good-natured simplicity made him a favourite with them all, until his vanity had become quite unendurable. He plumed himself immensely on being the real originator of the Magazine, and of the Chaldee MS. He was a very frequent contributor, but, in addition to his own genuine compositions, he got the credit of numberless performances, both in prose and verse, which he had never beheld till they appeared under his name in the pages of the Magazine. This was a part of that system of mystification practised in the management, which has never been carried so far in any other publication, and undoubtedly contributed very greatly to its success. The illustrious example of Sir Walter Scott had given encouragement to this species of deception, and the editor and writers of *Blackwood* thought themselves quite at liberty, not only to perplex the public by affixing all sorts of fictitious names and addresses to their communications,[1] but to put forth their *jeux d'esprit* occasionally under cover of the names of real personages who had never dreamed of so distinguishing themselves. This was certainly carrying the

[1] In the early numbers of the Magazine one meets a perfect host of these mythical personages, and the impression conveyed to the credulous reader must have been that contributions were flowing in from remarkable persons in all quarters of the empire. There was really so much variety and individuality imparted to these imaginary characters that it was very difficult to perceive that the same writer was assuming the guises of William Wastle, Esq., and Dr. Ulrick Sternstare, and Philip Kempferhausen, and the Baron Lauerwinkel.

system to a most unwarrantable length ; but it must be allowed that in the case of the two individuals most played upon in this respect, the liberty was taken by no means amiss. "The Shepherd" was one of these, and he rather enjoyed the fame which was thus thrust upon him in addition to his own proper deserts.[1] He gives a most amusing account of his sufferings at the hands of Lockhart, whom he describes as "a mischievous Oxford puppy, dancing after the young ladies, and drawing caricatures of every one who came in contact with him." "I dreaded his eye terribly," he says, "and it was not without reason, for he was very fond of playing tricks on me, but always in such a way that it was impossible to lose temper with him. I never parted company with him that my judgment was not entirely jumbled with regard to characters, books, and literary articles of every description."[2] Lockhart continued to keep his mind in the utmost perplexity for years in all things that related to the Magazine. The Shepherd was naturally anxious to know whose the tremendous articles were that made so much sensation monthly, and having

[1] His expressions of opinion on the subject varied according to his mood, but his sober judgment of the matter is on record in his own words :— "My friends in general have been of opinion that he (Wilson) has amused himself and the public too often at my expense ; but, except in one instance, which terminated very ill for me, and in which I had no more concern than the man in the moon, I never discovered any evil design on his part, and thought it all excellent sport. At the same time, I must acknowledge that it was using too much freedom with any author to print his name in full to poems, letters, and essays which he himself never saw. I do not say he has done this, but either he or some one else has done it many a time." This was written in 1832. Of Wilson's own kind feeling to Hogg, see letter of 1833.

[2] Hogg's *Memoirs*.

found by experience that he could extract no information out of Sym or Wilson, he would repair to Lockhart to ask him, awaiting his reply with fixed eye and a beating heart: "Then, with his cigar in his mouth, his one leg flung carelessly over the other, and without the symptom of a smile on his face, or one twinkle of mischief in his dark grey eye, he would father the articles on his brother, Captain Lockhart, or Peter Robertson, or Sheriff Cay, or James Wilson, or that queer, fat 'body,' Dr. Scott, and sometimes on James and John Ballantyne, and Sam Anderson, and poor Baxter. Then away I flew with the wonderful news to my other associates, and if any remained incredulous, I swore the facts down through them; so that before I left Edinburgh I was accounted the greatest liar that was in it except one."[1] The simple Shepherd by and by found out that these conspirators had made up their minds to act on O'Doherty's principle, of never denying anything they had *not* written, or ever acknowledging anything they *had*. He accordingly thought himself safe in thenceforth signing his name to everything he published. "But as soon," he says, "as the rascals perceived this, they signed my name as fast as I did. They then continued the incomparable *Noctes Ambrosianæ* for the sole purpose of putting all the sentiments into the Shepherd's mouth which they durst not avowedly say themselves, and these, too, often applying to my best friends."[2]

A single instance will show to what lengths this system of deception, for it can be called nothing else, was carried. In the articles on Leigh Hunt already

[1] Hogg's *Memoirs*. [2] *Ibid.*

mentioned, he was accused, among other things, of having pestered his friend Hazlitt to review him in the *Edinburgh*. Soon after—I find from Leigh Hunt's "Correspondence," recently published—he wrote to Lord Jeffrey the letter given below.[1] Which of the writers in *Blackwood* perpetrated this very wicked joke I know not, but its point lay in the fact that Sir J. G. Dalyell, with whose name so great a liberty had been taken, was perhaps of all men then in Edinburgh the one who, as a good Whig, regarded *Blackwood's Magazine* with most abhorrence.[2] A correspondent informs me that he recollects well Sir John coming to him in a state of violent agitation, to show the letter he had just received from Leigh Hunt, enclosing the pretended

1 "DEAR SIR,—I trouble you with this, to say, that since my last I have been made acquainted with the atrocious nonsense written about me in *Blackwood's Magazine*, and that nothing can be falser than what is said respecting my having asked and pestered Mr. Hazlitt to write an article upon my poem in the *Edinburgh Review*. I never breathed a syllable to him on the subject, as anybody who knows me would say for me at once, for I am reckoned, if anything, somewhat over fastidious and fantastic on such matters. I received last night a letter, signed John Erchom (Graham?) Dalyell, advocate, the author of which tells me at last that he is the writer of the article, and that he did not mean to attack my private character! He only attacked the bad principles I evinced in my writings. You may conceive by this that this letter is a strange mixture of affected airs and real paltering. I have written this evening to Edinburgh, according to the signature, to ask whether Mr. Dalyell (if there is such a person) avows himself the author of the letter. But I am taking up your time with these matters. I merely wished, in the first instance, to state what I have mentioned above. —Believe me, my dear Sir, most sincerely yours, LEIGH HUNT.

"13, LISSON GROVE, 1817."

2 He had been held up to ridicule, under a most horrible disguise, in the "Chaldee MS.," for which, however, he had the satisfaction of receiving damages in an action brought against the publisher.

confession of authorship by himself. "Oh, the villany of these fellows!" exclaimed the persecuted Baronet. It was in truth a most unscrupulous trick.

But the most elaborate and successful of these mystifications, of all which I suspect the invention must be attributed to Lockhart, was that about Dr. Scott of Glasgow, or "the Odontist," as he dubbed him. I am not aware, indeed, of any other instance of this kind of joke being carried out so steadily and with such entire success. The Doctor was a dentist, who practised both in Edinburgh and Glasgow, but resided chiefly in the latter city,—a fat, bald, queer-looking, and jolly little man, fond of jokes and conviviality, but with no more pretensions to literary or poetic skill than a *street porter*. To his own and his friends' astonishment he was introduced in *Blackwood's Magazine* as one of its most valued contributors, and as the author of a variety of clever verses. There was no mistake about it, "Dr. James Scott, 7 Miller Street, Glasgow," was a name and address as well known as that of Mr. Blackwood himself. The ingenious author had contrived to introduce so many of the Doctor's peculiar phrases, and references to his Saltmarket acquaintances, that the Doctor himself gradually began to believe that the

"The Odontist."

verses were really his own, and when called on to sing one of his songs in company, he assumed the airs of authorship with perfect complacency. The "Odontist" became recognised as one of Blackwood's leading characters, and so far was the joke carried, that a volume of his compositions was gravely advertised in a list of new works, prefixed to the Magazine, as "in the press."[1] Even the acute publisher, John Ballantyne, Hogg relates, was so convinced of the Odontist's genius, that he expressed a great desire to be introduced to so remark-

[1] Had the volume ever appeared, it would have proved a very unique collection. One of the songs attributed to him became so popular, and is really so admirable in its kind, as to be worth reproducing here as a specimen of these curious lyrics. There is no doubt that Mr. Lockhart was the author.

"CAPTAIN PATON'S LAMENT.

"Touch once more a sober measure, and let punch and tears be shed,
For a prince of good old fellows, that, alack-a-day, is dead!
For a prince of worthy fellows, and a pretty man also,
That has left the Saltmarket in sorrow, grief, and wo.
Oh, we ne'er shall see the like of Captain Paton no mo!

"His waistcoat, coat, and breeches were all cut off the same web,
Of a beautiful snuff-colour, or a modest genty drab;
The blue stripe in his stocking round his neat slim leg did go,
And his ruffles of the cambric fine they were whiter than the snow.
Oh, we ne'er shall see the like of Captain Paton no mo!

"His hair was curled in order, at the rising of the sun,
In comely rows and buckles smart that about his ears did run;
And before there was a toupée that some inches up did grow,
And behind there was a long queue that did o'er his shoulders flow.
Oh, we ne'er shall see the like of Captain Paton no mo!

"And whenever we forgathered, he took off his wee three-cockit,
And he proffered you his snuff-box, which he drew from his side-pocket;
And on Burdett or Buonaparte he would make a remark or so,
And then along the plainstones like a provost he would go.
Oh, we ne'er shall see the like of Captain Paton no mo!

able a man, and wished to have the honour of being his publisher. The Doctor's fame went far beyond Edinburgh. Happening to pay a visit to Liverpool, he was immediately welcomed by the literary society of the town as the "glorious Odontist" of *Blackwood's Magazine*, and received a complimentary dinner, which he accepted in entire good faith, replying to the toast of the evening with all the formality that became the occasion.

But the spirit of fun and mischief that prompted these outrageous jokes did not confine itself to practising them on the outer world. The overflowing satire of the inventors was turned by them even upon one another. In a very clever but rather tedious composi-

"Now and then upon a Sunday he invited me to dine,
On a herring and a mutton-chop, which his maid dressed very fine;
There was also a little Malmsey, and a bottle of Bordeaux,
Which between me and the Captain passed nimbly to and fro.
Oh, I ne'er shall take pot-luck with Captain Paton no mo!

"Or if a bowl was mentioned, the Captain he would ring,
And bid Nelly run to the Westport, and a stoup of water bring;
Then would he mix the genuine stuff, as they made it long ago,
With limes that on his property in Trinidad did grow.
Oh, we ne'er shall taste the like of Captain Paton's punch no mo!

"And then all the time he would discourse so sensible and courteous,
Perhaps talking of last sermon he had heard from Dr. Porteous,
Or some little bit of scandal about Mrs. So and So,
Which he scarce could credit, having heard the *con*, but not the *pro*.
Oh, we ne'er shall hear the like of Captain Paton no mo!

"Or when the candles were brought forth, and the night was fairly setting in,
He would tell some fine old stories about Minden-field or Dettingen;
How he fought with a French major, and despatched him at a blow,
While his blood ran out like water on the soft grass below.
Oh, we ne'er shall hear the like of Captain Paton no mo!

tion of Lockhart's, called the "Mad Banker of Amsterdam," he pokes his fun at his friends all round. There was a society in Edinburgh called the "Dilettanti" club, of which Wilson was President. They came in for a sketch, and he begins with his friend the President:—

"They're pleased to call themselves *The Dilettanti*,
The President's the first I chanced to shew 'em;
He writes more malagrugrously than Dante,
The City of the Plague's a shocking poem;

---

"But at last the Captain sickened, and grew worse from day to day,
And all missed him in the coffee-room, from which he now stayed away;
On Sabbath, too, the Wee Kirk made a melancholy show,
All for wanting of the presence of our venerable beau.
Oh, we ne'er shall see the like of Captain Paton no mo!

"And in spite of all that Cleghorn and Corkindale could do,
It was plain, from twenty symptoms, that death was in his view;
So the Captain made his testament, and submitted to his foe,
And we laid him by the Ram's-horn kirk; 'tis the way we all must go.
Oh, we ne'er shall see the like of Captain Paton no mo!

"*Join all in chorus, jolly boys*, and let punch and tears be shed,
For this prince of good old fellows that, alack-a-day, is dead!
For this prince of worthy fellows, and a pretty man also,
That has left the Saltmarket in sorrow, grief, and wo!
For it ne'er shall see the like of Captain Paton no mo!

For a complete copy of this lyric see *Blackwood*, vol. v. p. 735.

Drs. Corkindale and Cleghorn.

But yet he is a spirit light and jaunty,
And jocular enough to those who know him;
To tell the truth, I think John Wilson shines
More o'er a bowl of punch than in his lines."

It is said that my father chanced to see the proof-sheet by accident before it went to press, and instantly dashed in immediately after the above stanza, not a little to the chagrin of the author, the following impromptu lines :—

"Then touched I off friend Lockhart (Gibson John),
So fond of jabbering about Tieck and Schlegel,
Klopstock and Wieland, Kánt and Mendelssohn,
All high Dutch quacks like Spurzheim or Feinagle;
Him the Chaldee yclept the Scorpion;
The claws but not the pinions of the eagle
Are Jack's; but though I do not mean to flatter,
Undoubtedly he has strong powers of satire."

The troubles in which the publisher and supporters of the Magazine became involved commenced, as has been seen, with its very first number under the new *régime*. The assaults on Coleridge and Hunt might have been overlooked by the Edinburgh public; but the Chaldee MS., though in reality a joke in comparison, raised a storm of solemn indignation, which it required all the courage and energy of the publisher to bear up against. In a second edition of the Magazine which was very rapidly called for, the obnoxious article was withdrawn,[1] doubtless much to the disappoint-

[1] The following note was prefixed to the November number :—"The editor has learned with regret that an article in the first edition of No. VII., which was intended as a *jeu-d'esprit*, has been construed so as to give offence to individuals justly entitled to respect and regard; he has, on that account, withdrawn it in the second edition, and can only add that, if what has happened could have been anticipated, the article in question certainly never would have appeared."

ment of purchasers. For in fact the outcry, which at first seemed to threaten the extinction of the Magazine, was the best possible stimulant to its success. It throve on opposition, and waxed more bold and provoking as the enemy showed more sensitive appreciation of its power. But for some time the publisher's position was no enviable one, as may be gathered from the second of two following letters from Mrs. Wilson to her sister in England :—

"EDINBURGH, *December* 18, 1817.

"I hope you got your last number of the Magazine; I have been so busy *working* that I have not had time to look at it. The first thing in it, on the 'Pulpit Eloquence of Scotland,' is written by Mr. Lockhart, a young advocate, a friend of Mr. Wilson's. I believe there is not much of Mr. W.'s in the last number. I think there is something about the Lament of Tasso; that is his. You were right in your conjecture about Mr. Hogg's production; his prose compositions are not in the happiest style; there will be another of his in the next number,—a letter addressed to C. K. Sharpe, Esq. Another article in it, entitled, 'On the late National Calamity,' is Mr. W.'s; and the one on Mr. Alison's pulpit eloquence is written by a son of his. A review of Mandeville is by Mr. Lockhart. There is something besides of Mr. W.'s; but I don't exactly know what it is. I think it is about Old Masters."

"*May* 20, 1818.

"The number that comes out to-day is pronounced a very good one, and I suppose you will soon have it. The articles written by Mr. W. are those 'On Truth,'

the 'Fudge Family in Paris,' Childe Harold, canto 4th, and Horace Walpole's Letters. The letter to Dr. Chalmers is by Mr. Lockhart. I am not quite sure if Mr. W. will have anything in the next *Edinburgh Review*, but I hope he will, and I will tell you what it is when I know.

"You asked if Ensign O'Doherty was a fictitious character; he is, and was created by a Mr. Hamilton, a particularly handsome and gentlemanly young man in the army; he is a brother of Sir William Hamilton, a friend of Mr. Wilson's, whom you may have heard me mention. The city of late has been in a state of pleasing commotion owing to a *fracas* which took place last week between Blackwood and a Mr. Douglas from Glasgow, a disgusting, vulgar, conceited writer, whose name was mentioned in one of Nicol Jarvie's letters[1] in the Magazine, which gave the gentleman such high offence, that after mature deliberation he determined on coming to Edinburgh, and horsewhipping Mr. Blackwood. Accordingly, about a week since he arrived; and one day as the worthy bookseller was entering his shop, Mr. D. followed him, and laid his whip across his shoulder; and before Mr. B. had time to recover from his surprise, Mr. D. walked off without leaving his address. Mr. B. immediately went out and bought a stick; and, accompanied by Mr. Hogg, went in search of Mr. D., whom at last they detected just about to step into a coach on his return to Glasgow. Mr. B. immediately attacked him, and beat him as hard as he could, and then permitted him to take his place

[1] *Blackwood*, January and March 1818.

in the coach, and proceed home, which he did. I have given you a long story, which I fear you cannot feel the least interest in; but as you take the Magazine, you will not be wholly indifferent to the fate of the publisher, whose conduct on the late occasion is thought perfectly correct; the other man everybody thinks has acted like a fool."

Nothing was left undone to spread the fame and fear of Blackwood. Formidable announcements of forthcoming criticisms were monthly advertised, to keep expectation on the stretch. The very titles of the serial articles indicated uncommon fertility of invention, and a terrible faculty for calling names. There were articles on "The Cockney School of Poetry," on "The Pluckless School of Politics," on "The Gormandizing School of Eloquence." There were letters to literary characters by Timothy Tickler, by Frederick Baron von Lauerwinkel, by Dr. Olinthus Petre, T.C.D., by Ensign O'Doherty, by Mordecai Mullion, and a host of others too numerous to mention. The variety and mystification thus produced undoubtedly gave great additional zest to the writing; and this apparently multitudinous host of contributors danced about the victims of their satire with a vivacity and gleefulness which the public could not but relish even when it condemned. After all, and giving their full weight to the censures which were justly incurred by many of these compositions, there is much truth in the following remarks in a vindication of itself prefixed to the Magazine a few years after:—"For a series of years, the Whigs in Scotland had all the jokes to themselves, they laughed and lashed as they liked; and while

all this was the case, did anybody ever hear them say that either laughing or lashing were among the seven deadly sins? People said at times, no doubt, that Mr. Jeffrey was a more gentlemanly Whig than Mr. Brougham; that Sydney Smith grinned more good-humouredly than Sir James Mackintosh, and so forth, but all these were satirists, and, strange to say, they all rejoiced in the name." While I cannot agree with the statement following these remarks, that the only real offence of Blackwood's contributors was their being Tories, there is no doubt, I think, that that circumstance greatly aggravated their sins in the eyes of their opponents.[1]

The faults in question were, however, in themselves sufficiently grave, and may now be referred to, it is hoped, without risk of rekindling the old embers. The worst of them undoubtedly, for which even "Dr. Peter Morris" could afterwards see no apology, was the attack on the venerable Playfair, which appeared in 1818, in the September number of the Magazine, under the guise of a "Letter to the Rev. Professor Laugner, occasioned by his writing in the Königsberg Review: by the Baron von Lauerwinkel."[2] In a previous letter

[1] Insolence and personality have very seldom been altogether wanting in the vigorous youth of journalism, and some of the ablest periodicals that have ever appeared have incurred the most censure in this respect. The *Edinburgh Review* cannot by impartial judges be pronounced to have been immaculate. The *Quarterly* is open to the same remark; and *Fraser's Magazine*, that most philosophic and well-conducted periodical, for some time seemed bent on outdoing the early style of Blackwood, after its older sister had subsided into propriety and self-restraint.

[2] This mischievous composition professed to be a translation from a German periodical (a literary stratagem, by the way, which probably set the example which Mr. Carlyle, among others, has turned to such frequent

under the signature of "Idoloclastes," a strong remonstrance had been addressed to Dr. Chalmers on his support of the *Edinburgh Review*, in which, with great professions of respect and admiration both for Chalmers and Jeffrey, there was mingled a most offensive strain of rebuke on the subject of infidel principles, which were alleged to be characteristic of the Review. In the pretended letter to Professor Laugner, these charges were repeated with still greater violence of language, and combined with the same professions of regret and esteem. The excellent Professor of Natural Philosophy was broadly accused of having turned his back on the faith which he once preached,[1] and allied himself with a band of unprincipled wits and insidious infidels. The author of both these letters was Mr. Lockhart, and they are striking specimens of that unpleasant power which led his own familiar friends to attribute to him in their allegorical description, the character of the *Scorpion*. For calm, concentrated sting it would be hard to find six pages to match the Letter of the Baron Lauer-

and effective purpose), and was thus introduced:—"The Königsberg Review, conducted by the late ingenious M. Mundwerk, was a few years ago very much admired in Germany by numerous readers, who took delight in seeing infidel and unpatriotic opinions maintained by men of acknowledged wit and talent. Strange as the circumstance may appear, it is nevertheless true that this journal numbered among its supporters several clergymen of the Lutheran Church. One of these was the late celebrated preacher, Hammerschlag (Dr. Chalmers was here pointed at), another was Professor Laugner of the University of Königsberg. The indignation of the zealous and worthy Baron von Lauerwinkel was excited," etc.

[1] Professor Playfair was parish minister of Liff and Bervie from 1773 to 1782. He became assistant to Professor Ferguson in 1785, and in 1805 resigned the chair of Mathematics for that of Natural Philosophy, which he occupied till his death in 1819.

winkel.[1] The very natural indignation excited by this attack on one of the most amiable and eminent men of whom Edinburgh could then boast, attained its climax in the publication of a pamphlet, called *Hypocrisy unveiled and Calumny detected, in a Review of Blackwood's Magazine.* The author wielded a powerful pen, and fixing on Wilson and Lockhart as the special objects of his criticism, accused them both in very unvarnished terms of conduct disgraceful to men of letters and gentlemen. His own style, indeed, was not the most choice, his elaborate periods being thickly strewed with all the harshest epithets to be found in the dictionary. But much of his censure went home to the mark, and he pledged himself, in conclusion, if the subjects of his criticism did not amend their ways, to return to the charge "with less reserve, and more personal effect."[2] Who the author of this philippic was remained a secret, but there is now no reason to doubt that he was him-

[1] Much as these letters were to be condemned, however, it is but fair to observe that the example had been shown on the other side. A voluminous and vehement writer, *Calvinus*, already referred to, had inflicted not less than five pamphlets on the public, addressed to Dr. M'Crie and Dr. Andrew Thomson on their sinful alliance with *Blackwood's Magazine.* In thundering sentences, garnished with plentiful texts of Scripture, he calls upon them to "remember the fate of that priest who associated himself with the infidel compilers of the *Encyclopédie,*" and hopes that no priest in this country is willing to let it be supposed that he receives wages from a till that is replenished by the dissemination of blasphemy. Similar remonstrances and insinuations were very frequently levelled against Dr. Brewster; and there can be no doubt that such attacks were calculated to provoke retaliation.

[2] In furtherance of this purpose he announced as preparing for publication "A Letter to the Dean and Faculty of Advocates on the propriety of expelling the Leopard and the Scorpion from that hitherto respectable body."

self a well-known member of the legal body. His allusions to Wilson and Lockhart were too pointed to be passed without notice, and both sought redress in the mode then considered necessary for the vindication of the character of gentlemen. The author of the pamphlet received these communications as might have been expected, he declined to reveal his identity, but printed the correspondence.[1]

[1] From the *Scotsman*, Saturday, October 24, 1818:—

"*To the Author of Hypocrisy Unveiled.*

"SIR,—As it is no part of a manly disposition to use insulting epithets to an unknown enemy, who may perhaps have resolved to remain unknown, I shall not, at present, bestow any upon you. So long as you remain concealed you are a nonentity; and any insults offered by me to a person in that situation might probably not be felt to carry with them any degradation to him, and certainly would not be felt as conferring any triumph upon me. It is probable, however, that you will come forward from your concealment, when you feel that you cannot continue in it without the consciousness of cowardice. I therefore request your name and address, that I may send a friend to you to deliver my opinion of your character, and to settle time and place for a meeting, at which I may exact satisfaction from you for the public insults you have offered to me.

"JOHN WILSON.

"53, QUEEN STREET, *Friday, Oct.* 23, 1818."

"*To the Author of Hypocrisy Unveiled.*

"SIR,—I have no wish to apply epithets of insult to you till I know who you are. If you suppose yourself to have any claim to the character of a gentleman, you will take care that I be not long without this knowledge.—I remain, Sir, your obedient servant,

"J. G. LOCKHART.

"23, MAITLAND STREET, *Thursday, Oct.* 22, 1818."

"*To John Wilson, Esq., Advocate.*

"*Friday, 23d October.*

"SIR,—The note which I understand to have been forwarded to you by my publisher, will have explained why I did not receive your communication till within these few hours.

"If you *be not* a principal conductor or supporter of *Blackwood's Magazine*, you have no reason for addressing me. If you be not the author or furnisher of materials for an attack on Mr. M'Cormick, which you yourself stated to *be highly unjustifiable*, and of which you denied all knowledge, *upon your honour*; if you be not the author of a most abusive attack on your friend, Mr. Wordsworth; if you did not, by an unfounded story,

When Mr. Lockhart found that the author would not reveal himself, he appears to have concerned himself no more about the matter, but to have relieved his feelings by caricaturing all the parties concerned in his friend's literary "*Ledger*," as the following pen-and-ink sketch of the supposed author, taken from its pages, will show. "The Leopard" and "The Scorpion," as drawn in the "*Ledger*," will be found on pages 252, 253.

prevail with Mr. Blackwood's former editors to insert that attack; if you be not the secret traducer of Mr. Playfair, Mr. Hazlitt, and Mr. Coleridge; if you be not the wanton and cruel reviler of those gentlemen named in my pamphlet, with whom you had lived in habits of friendship; if you be not one of the principal vomitories of that calumnious and malignant abuse which has, through the medium of *Blackwood's Magazine*, been poured out on all that is elevated, worthy, or estimable; if you be not the writer of one or other of the letters addressed in the name of Z. to Mr. Leigh Hunt, and if you do not take shelter under a quotation from Junius, and submit to be publicly stigmatized by him as a coward and a scoundrel,—then you have nothing to say to me, for I speak only of the writer or writers who have committed these enormities. But if all or any of these things apply to you, in that case you have lost every claim to the character of a gentleman, and have no right whatsoever to demand that satisfaction which is due only to one who has been unjustly accused.

"The cause, besides, in which I have engaged is a public one; it is that of right feeling against all that is vile, treacherous, and malignant. My vocation is not ended; I have pledged myself to the public to watch your proceedings, and, if occasion shall require, to give a more ample exposition of your conduct and character—to inflict a more signal chastisement on your crimes. This pledge *shall be redeemed.*

"Do not think that I shall be deterred, by any threat, from discharging the duty I have thus imposed on myself, or that I shall be so weak as, by a premature avowal of my name, to deprive myself of the means.

"Prove to the satisfaction of the public that the charges which I have made are unfounded, or that they do not apply to you; or, as you yourself ask of Mr. Hunt,—'Confess that you have done wrong,—make a clean breast of it,—beg pardon of your God and of your country for the iniquity of your polluted pen,—and the last to add one pang to the secret throbbings of a contrite spirit,' the first to meet your challenge, if then renewed, shall be, Sir, your, etc.,

"THE AUTHOR OF 'HYPOCRISY UNVEILED.'

"*P.S.*—As Mr. Lockhart obviously acts in concert with yourself, I have made the same answer to him which I now make to you."

The supposed Author of "Hypocrisy Unveiled."

The following admirable letter, addressed at this time to my father, by his friend the Rev. Robert Morehead,[1] seems, in spite of its length, to be worthy of insertion here. I have no doubt it produced a considerable impression on his mind, though at the time his indignation at the charges of the pamphleteer made him rather impatient of remonstrance:—

"*Sunday Evening.*

"MY DEAR WILSON,—I trust you will forgive me for addressing you on a subject which has been running in my head all week, and has incapacitated me, I believe, from reading or writing, for whenever I attempted either,

[1] This estimable man was for many years an Episcopalian clergyman in Edinburgh. He was presented to the rectory of Easington, Yorkshire, in 1832, and died there in December 1842.

Mr. Morehead, as may be gathered from the above letter, was a dear friend of my father's, but shortly after this date he became editor of *Constable's Magazine;* and it is to be regretted that, "in that lamentable madness of the time which drove high-minded and honourable men from their propriety," my father, by the unscrupulous liberty of his pen in *Blackwood's Magazine,* gave offence to Mr. Morehead, who, justly displeased, wrote an indignant letter to him, begging that personal allusions should cease as far as he was concerned, and promising that, on his part, he should abstain from any allusion to the Professor in his Magazine. I am happy to be able to say the terms of peace were observed, as their friendship remained unbroken. A notice of Mr. Morehead is made a dozen years later in a *Noctes,* which exhibits my father's real estimate of the author of *Dialogues on Natural and Revealed Religion.*

"*Shepherd.* I love that man."

"*North.* So do I, James, and so do all that know him personally—his talents, his genius, and, better than both, his truly Christian character, mild and pure."

"*Shepherd.* And also bricht."

"*North.* Yes, bright:

'In wit a man—simplicity a child.'"

—*Noctes,* May 1830.

your image, or the image of some other person or thing connected with *Blackwood's Magazine*, immediately took its station in my brain, and prevented any other idea from obtaining an entrance.

"I have frequently thought of writing to you, yet I have always drawn back, from an aversion to appear to be giving advice or intermeddling in an affair with which I have nothing to do, separate from the interest which every one who knows you must take in you. I hear, however, that you have called on me to-day, and I cannot any longer refrain from saying something to you, though perhaps it may be rather incoherent, on the unpleasant circumstances of the last week. That blame must attach to you and your friend Lockhart for the delinquencies of *Blackwood's Magazine* I am afraid must be admitted; but even if the blame should not go the full length of the accusations which are made against you, I have myself too distinct a conception of the hazards accompanying mysterious and secret composition, and the temptations which it throws in the way of men of imagination and genius (much inferior to either of yours), that I can conceive, in the heat of writing, your trespassing very much upon the limits of propriety or a due regard for the common courtesies and regulations of social life. As it is impossible, too, for another person to enter into all the feelings which may have actuated you on different occasions, I can imagine that you may have done what you are stated to have done, without deserving those imputations which have been thrown upon you. Indeed I cannot, for my own part, think anything very bad of you. You have

always appeared to me a person of high and noble character, and I should be very sorry to view you in any other light. I am not at all, however, surprised that torrents of abuse should be thrown upon you, both in private and public, and I cannot say that the world is unjust in this retaliation.

"The person who has written the anonymous letter to you does not act perhaps in the most chivalrous manner possible, not to let himself be known; but I rather think he is in the right, and as I am one of those people who are disposed to believe all things, I imagine he is really what he gives himself out to be—a person unconnected with the matters in dispute, and determined, from a sense of justice, to defend what he thinks the cause of violated public tranquillity.

"If he had been himself a party, he would have written with more bitterness, and been less disposed to make stupid quotations. All this, however, my dear Wilson, unpleasant as it is at present, may be attended with a very excellent result, if you will allow it to be so. Both you and Lockhart are, I think, designed for much higher things than the game you are playing. I believe that, with the wantonness of youth and conscious power about you, which you do not care much how you exhibit, you are really desirous of doing good; and that you are anxious to root out of the world false sentiments in politics and religion, with a perfect unconcern who may entertain them. This is the best view to take of you; and in this kind of crusade, you are heedless what shock you may give to individuals, whose feelings yet deserve to be con-

sulted, and with whom the public will, in general, take part. I really think nothing less than a Divine commission, such as Joshua received to extirpate the Canaanites, could justify the way in which you are throwing around you poisoned arrows against those whom you surmise to be infidels. When you go beyond a certain mark, you lose your aim. While with all the eloquence that you can muster, you will never persuade the reasonable part of the nation that the *Edinburgh Review* has for its insidious, skulking design to make as many Jacobins and infidels as it can, I suppose the character of that publication is pretty well understood. Nobody takes it up in the notion that they will receive religious instruction from it, or that the writers are very competent to give it; but nobody of sense supposes, whatever slips it may sometimes have made, that its object and secret view is to pull down Christianity; and particularly, no one who knows Mr. Playfair conceives that this is one of his darling contemplations and schemes, whatever may be his opinions upon the subject of Revelation, which nobody has any business to rake out. I believe the only slip he is supposed to have committed in the *Review*, was something on the subject of miracles; and what he says is, I imagine, defensible enough, and reconcilable to a belief in Christianity. Then as to politics, although here, too, there may be various offences, yet I believe the general drift of the politics of the *Edinburgh Review* is felt by the nation to have on the whole a good tendency. If you and your friend persist in writing in *Blackwood's Magazine*, I exhort you strenuously to

make that Magazine what you are capable of making it; to take the hint which has been given you; to take warning from the awkward perplexities in which it has involved you, and from which it would be idle to attempt to extricate yourselves entirely, and henceforth to avoid unhandsome personalities. I do not say, spare the *Edinburgh Review;* on the contrary, where you find in it any sentiment that you think militating either against the Constitution or Christianity, by all means expose it; but do not impute motives to the writers which you cannot think exist. Your readers will go more thoroughly along with you if you are temperate, and give that Review the credit which it deserves, and speak of its authors rather as men who do not see the whole truth, than as men who are wittingly blind. If you cannot get the regulation of that Magazine into your own hands, but must have your writings coupled with party politics and personalities, which you yourselves disapprove of, I really think, for your own credit, you should have nothing to do with it; for there is not a piece of abomination in the Magazine which will not be fathered upon one or other of you; and neither Christianity nor Toryism is at present in so low a state that there is any necessity to suffer martyrdom."

The following letter from my father about the same time appears to have been addressed to Mr. Morehead, in reference to a suspicion of Mr. Macvey Napier having been the author of the pamphlet. It betrays the keenness of his feelings on the subject:—

"53, Queen Street,
*Half-past Ten, Wednesday,* 1817.

"My dear Sir,—Your message to me from Mr. Napier would have been perfectly satisfactory, even had I had any suspicion that he was the author of the pamphlet. But knowing Mr. Napier to be a gentleman and a man of education, I could not have suspected him to be a blackguard and a villain. Had public rumour forced me at any time to ask him if he was the author of that pamphlet, the question would have been accompanied with an ample apology for putting it, for, without that, the question would itself have been an insult. Assure Mr. Napier of this, and that I am sorry he should have been put under the necessity by disagreeable and stupid rumour of disowning that of which I know his nature to be incapable. Had I suspected Mr. Napier, and yet 'alluded' to him as the object of my suspicion, I should have acted like an idiot and a coward. In a case like this, suspicion is not to be so intimated. Should I ever suspect any man, I will send with privacy a friend to him. He may be a man of some nerve, and if ever he avows himself, he will require them all. My affection and friendship for you never can suffer any abatement. But may I gently say to you, this villanous and lying pamphlet has been read by you with feelings, and has left on your mind an impression, which I did not imagine such a publication could have created in you towards your very attached friend,

"J. Wilson."

Not the least of the ill results of that unhappy letter of the Baron Lauerwinkel was the interruption of the friendly relation between my father and Jeffrey. The latter conveyed his sentiments on the subject in these manly and honourable terms :—

"CRAIGCROOK HOUSE, 13*th October* 1818.

"MY DEAR SIR,—I take the liberty of enclosing a draft for a very inconsiderable sum, which is the remuneration our publisher enables me to make for your valuable contribution to the last number of the *Edinburgh Review;* and though nobody can know better than I do, that nothing was less in your contemplation in writing that article, it is a consequence to which you must resign yourself, as all our other regular contributors have done before you.

"And now having acquitted myself of the awkward part of my office with my usual awkwardness, I should proceed to talk to you of further contributions, and, . . . to save editorial disquisition on the best style of composition for such a journal, if I had not a still more awkward and far more painful subject to discuss in the first place.

"You are said to be a principal writer in, and a great director and active supporter of Blackwood's *Edinburgh Magazine.* In the last number of that work there is an attack upon my excellent friend Mr. Playfair, in my judgment so unhandsome and uncandid, that I really cannot consent either to ask or accept of favours from any one who is aiding or assisting in such a publication.

"I have not the least idea that you had any concern

in the composition of that particular paper, and perhaps I have been misinformed as to the nature and extent of your connexion with the work in general. But if it be as I supposed, and if you still profess to take the same interest in that Magazine, I do not see that we can possibly co-operate in any other publication.

"I have no right certainly, and I am sure I have no intention to rebuke you for any opinions you may entertain, or any views you may have formed of the proper way of expressing them; but if you think the scope and strain of the paper to which I allude in any degree justifiable, I can only say that your notions differ so widely from mine, that it is better that we should have no occasion to discuss them. To me, I confess, it appears that the imputations it contains are as malignant as they are false; and having openly applied these epithets to them, whenever I have had occasion to speak on the subject, I flatter myself that I do not violate the courtesy which I unfeignedly wish to observe towards you, or act unsuitably with the regard which I hope always to entertain for you, if I plainly repeat them here, as the grounds of a statement with which no light considerations could have induced me to trouble you.

"I say, then, that it is *false* that it is one of the principal objects, or any object at all, of the *Edinburgh Review* to discredit religion, or promote the cause of infidelity. I who have conducted the work for nearly fifteen years should know something of its objects, and I declare to you, upon my honour, that nothing with that tendency has ever been inserted without its

being followed with sincere regret both on my part and on that of all who have any permanent connexion with the work. That expressions of a light and indecorous nature have sometimes escaped us in the hurry of composition, and that in exposing the excesses of bigotry and intolerance, a tone of too great levity has been sometimes employed, I am most ready with all humility to acknowledge; but that anything was ever bespoken or written by the regular supporters of the work, or admitted, except by inadvertence, with a view to discredit the truth of religion, I most positively deny, and that it is no part of its object to do so, I think must be felt by every one of its candid readers.

"In the second place, I say it is false that Mr. P. lent his support to the *Review* in order to give credit and currency to its alleged infidel principles.

"And, finally, it is false that the writings which he has contributed to it have had any tendency to support those principles, or are intended to counteract the lessons which he once taught from the pulpit."

It is much to be regretted that my father's reply to this letter is not extant. What it may have been can only be conjectured. I can have no doubt that he would not attempt to justify the malignant article. But he was not a man to abandon his associates even when he disagreed with them. He had cast in his lot with *Blackwood* and its principles, and was resolved to stand by them at all hazards.

## CHAPTER IX.

### ANN STREET—MORAL PHILOSOPHY CHAIR.

### 1820.

An eventful life seldom falls to the lot of the man of letters. His vicissitudes and excitements are for the most part confined to an arena in which he figures little before the public gaze. In this sense Wilson's life was uneventful; but the constitution of his nature, both physical and mental, made it impossible that it should ever become uninteresting or monotonous. It may be said that he threw himself into the very heart of existence, and found in the lowliest things on earth a hidden virtue that made them cease to be vulgar in his eyes. For fundamentally, though that I know is not the general opinion, he was as much a philosopher as a poet, and had that true instinct, that electric rapidity of glance, that enables a man to penetrate through the forms of things to their real meaning and essence. And when free from the bias of passion or prejudice, his judgment was most accurate. Caprice or change in regard to principles, or persons, or tastes, was no part of his character. Faults of temper and intolerance sometimes glared forth, finding utterance, it might be, both violent and unreasonable. Thus his highly-strung nervous organization

made him keenly alive to all outward impressions, loud laughter, sudden noises, rudeness, affectation, and those offences against minor morals that are generally regarded with indifference or passing disgust, affected him painfully; and if but for a short time exposed to any such annoyances, no self-control prevented him from giving expression to his feelings. But such outbursts, whether manifested in spoken or written words, were as summer storms, that leave the air purer and the sky brighter than before. He was, in fact, too large a man to be unamiable. His natural temper was, in mature life, as it had been in boyhood and youth, sweet and sunny, and, with all his enjoyment of activity and excitement, he never liked any company half so well as that which he found at his own fireside. To that quiet and simple home, in which his happiness was summed up, we now turn for a short time.

Towards the end of the winter of 1819, my father, with his wife and children, now five in number, two boys and three girls,[1] left his mother's house, 53, Queen Street, and set up his household gods in a small and somewhat inconvenient house in Ann Street (No. 20). This little street, which forms the culminating point of the suburb of Stockbridge, was at that time quite "out of town," and is still a secluded place, overshadowed by the tall houses of Eton Terrace and Clarendon Crescent. In the literary "Ledger," already referred to, which contains all sorts of memoranda in my father's hand-

[1] Their names, in the order of their ages, were as follows:—John, born April 1812; Margaret, July 1813; Mary, August 1814; Blair, April 1816; Jane Emily, January 1817.

writing, there is a page taken up with an estimate of the cost of furniture for dining-room, sitting-room, nursery, servants' room, and kitchen, making up a total of £195, with the triumphant query at the end, in a bold hand, "Could it be less?" Truly, I think not. This little entry throws an interesting light on the circumstances of this devoted pair, who, eight years previously, had started in life so differently under the prosperous roof-tree of Elleray. But the limitation of their resources had from the beginning brought with it neither regret nor despondency, and now that they were for the first time fairly facing the cares of life, they took up the burden with hope and cheerfulness. My father felt strong in his own powers of work, and his deep affection for his wife and children was a mighty stimulus to exertion. My mother, on the other hand, along with a singular sweetness of disposition, possessed great prudence and force of character; she entered, as her letters indicate, into all that concerned her husband with wife-like zeal, and her sympathy and counsel were appreciated by him above all else that the world could bestow.

In withdrawing from the more fashionable part of Edinburgh, they did not, however, by any means exclude themselves from the pleasures of social intercourse with the world. In Ann Street they found a pleasant little community that made residence there far from distasteful; the seclusion of the locality made it then, as it seems still to be, rather a favourite quarter with literary men and artists. The old mansion of St. Bernard's, the property and dwelling-house of Sir Henry Raeburn (the

glory of Scotland's portrait-painters) offered them its hospitality and kindly intercourse. No one can forget how, in the circle of his own family, that dignified old gentleman stood, himself a very picture, his fine intellectual countenance lightened by eyes most expressive, whose lambent glow gave to his face that inward look of soul he knew so well to impart to his own unsurpassed portraits. Genius shed its peculiar beauty over his aspect, yet memory loves more than aught else the recollections of the benevolent heart that lent to his manner a grace of kindliness as sincere as it was delightful. The place in Scottish art which he had so long occupied without a fellow was soon to become vacant. But a worthy successor was at that time following his footsteps to fame.

Sir John Watson Gordon lived with his father (then Captain, afterwards Admiral Watson) and a pleasant group of brothers and sisters, in the house adjoining that of Professor Wilson, in whom this rising artist found a warm and kind patron. Not a few of his early pictures were painted under the encouragement and advice of his genial friend. Almost the first subject that brought him into prominent comparison with the best English painters of the day was a portrait of my sister, when seven years of age—a beautifully coloured and poetically conceived picture. This gentleman has long since reaped the reward of his industry and talent, and now wears the honour of knighthood, along with the important position of President of the Royal Scottish Academy, continuing still, from time to time, to give evidence to the world, by the admirable vigour and

truthful individuality of his portraits, that his eminence is increasing with his years.

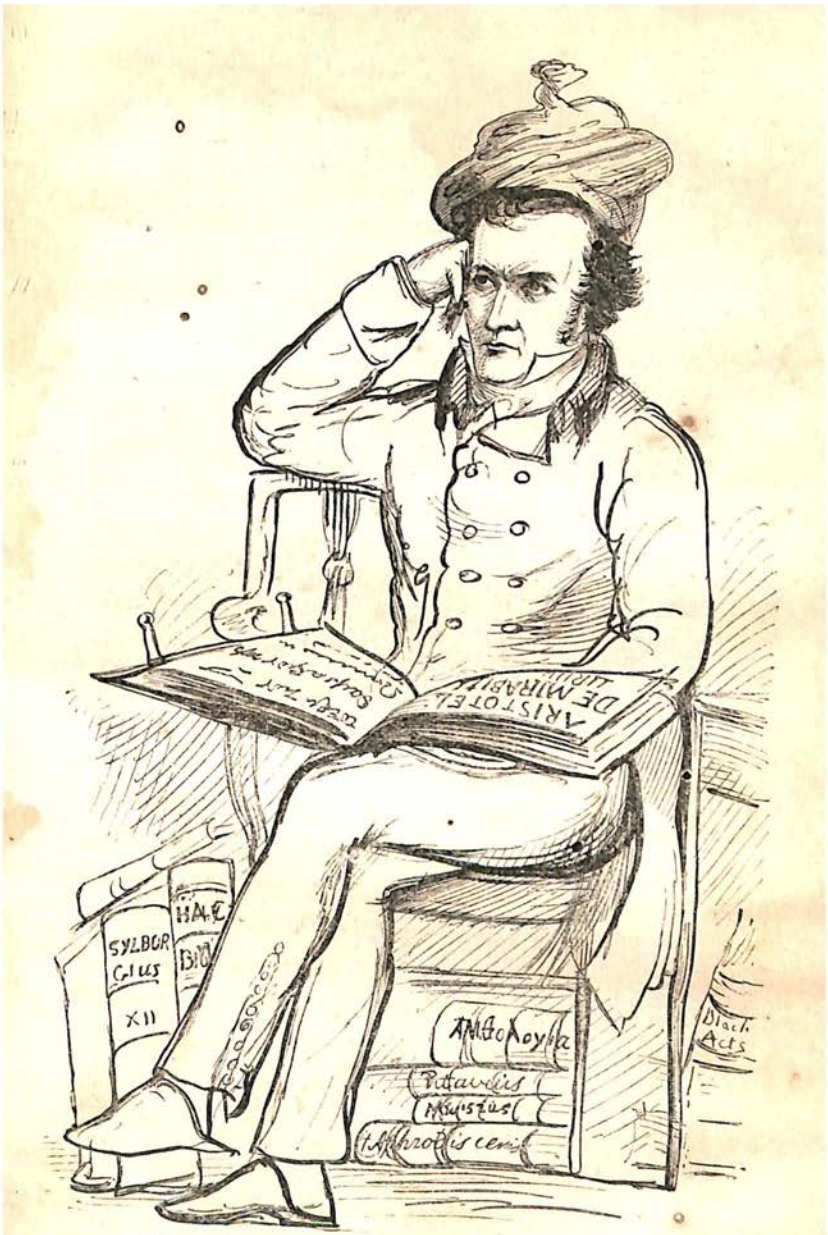
Another illustrious name is to be numbered in that coterie of artists. William Allan (who also attained the honour of knighthood and presidentship) was a frequent guest in my father's house. He had not long returned from a residence of some duration in the East. His extended travel and fresh experience of foreign lands, made his society much sought after. He had the advantage of an intimate friendship with Sir Walter Scott, in itself an introduction to intercourse with the best people of the time. Mr. Allan was a man whose intelligence, power of observation, quaint humour, gentle and agreeable manners, made him welcome to all. Many were the pleasant reunions that took place in those days under Professor Wilson's roof, where might be seen together Lockhart, Hogg, Galt, Sir William Hamilton, his brother, Captain Thomas Hamilton, Sir Adam Fergusson, Sir Henry Raeburn, Mr. Allan, and Watson Gordon. In such meetings as these, it may easily be imagined how the hours would pass, the conversation and merriment perhaps continuing till sun-rising.

Wilson had now apparently committed himself to literature as his vocation; and when he removed to Ann Street there seemed no great probability of his being soon called to any more definite sphere of exertion. His professional prospects were not much to be calculated on, for, though fitted in some respects to achieve distinction at the bar, he appears never to have seriously contemplated that as an object of ambition.

His aspirations were in a very different direction. Though his pursuits and acquirements had been of a very general and eclectic sort, he had given early proof of his love and capacity for philosophic studies. He had not, it is true, made philosophy his special pursuit like his illustrious friend Sir William Hamilton, for poetry and literature divided his allegiance. But the science of mind, and more particularly Moral Philosophy had for him at all times high attraction. Human nature had been in fact his study *par excellence*, and when the prospect opened to him of being able to cultivate that study, not merely as a field of analytical skill, but as a means of practically influencing the minds of others with all the authority of academic position, he eagerly grasped at it as an object worthy of his highest ambition. That prize was not to be won without a desperate struggle, to the history of which a few pages must now be devoted.

In April 1820, the chair of Moral Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh became vacant by the lamented death of Dr. Thomas Brown. The contest which ensued has had few parallels even in the history of that University, whilst the patronage lay with the Town-Council, whose members had to be canvassed personally like the voters in a rotten borough. My father announced himself as a candidate in the course of the month, and so did Sir William Hamilton. Other distinguished men were mentioned as possible competitors, such as Sir James Mackintosh and Mr. Malthus; but it soon became apparent that between these two alone the struggle was to lie. Then came

the tug of war. The rivals were intimate personal friends, and between them happily no unpleasant word or thought arose during the time that their respective friends were fighting for and against them, like Greek and Trojan. Both had been brilliant Oxonians; but the one was known to have devoted himself to philosophy, with a singleness of aim and a specialty of power, that seemed to his friends, and certainly not without reason, to throw the pretensions of his rival utterly into the shade. Happily for him, too, he had, as became a philosopher, abstained from any interference in public questions, either openly or in secret; and his retired and studious life afforded no possible mark for censure or insinuation even to the most malicious enemy. The other, though reckoned by men well fitted to judge, as a person singularly gifted with philosophic as well as poetic faculty, was better known in the outer world as a daring and brilliant *littérateur;* one of a band of writers who had excited much admiration, but also much righteous censure, and personally as a somewhat eccentric young man of very athletic and jovial tendencies. How these qualities affected his position as a candidate will speedily appear; but all other distinctions were lost sight of in the one great fact of political creed. Sir William was a Whig: Wilson was a Tory. The matter all lay in that. Wilson, too, was not only a Tory, but a Tory of the most unpardonable description; he was one of the leading hands, if not the editor, of that scandalous publication, *Blackwood's Magazine*, a man therefore who needed no further testimonial of




Sir William Hamilton, at Oxford.—From a sketch by Mr. Lockhart.

being at least an assassin and a reprobate. He, forsooth, a Professor of Moral Philosophy, a successor of Dugald Stewart! The thing was monstrous; an outrage on decency and common sense. Such, without exaggeration, was the view taken by the Whig side in this contest, and strenuously supported publicly in the columns of the *Scotsman*,[1] and privately in every circle where the name of *Blackwood* was a name of abomination and of fear.

How the proceedings of this election interested my mother may be seen best from her own true womanly feelings expressed without reserve, in a letter to her sister:—

"My mind has been anxiously occupied on Mr. Wil-

[1] A single specimen of the rhetoric used may suffice, being the peroration of a long and angry leading article which appeared immediately before the election. The electors were, in conclusion, thus solemnly adjured:—"Again we call upon those members of Council who are fathers of families; who respect the oaths they have taken; who have some regard for religion, morals, and decency, to read the Chaldee MS.; the pilgrimage to the 'Kirk of Shotts;' the attacks on Messrs. Wordsworth, Pringle, Dunbar, Coleridge, and others; to weigh and consider the spirit and character of many other articles in the Magazine, which are either written by Mr. Wilson, or published under his auspices; and if they can possibly excuse him as a private individual, we still put it to them how they can justify it to their conscience, their country, and their God, to select him as the man to fill the chair of Moral Philosophy, and to confide to him the taste, the morals, and the characters of the rising generation."

When the election was over, the public were informed, through the same channel, that the conduct of the electors had "stamped indelible disgrace on the Town-Council," and that though it was a prevalent opinion that they were already as low as they could be in the estimation of their fellow-citizens, the proceedings of that day had shown this conclusion to be erroneous, and demonstrated that there is in the lowest depth a lower still.

son's account, by an election in which he has, amongst other literary men, started as a candidate. It is for a Professor's Chair in the University here. The Professorship of Moral Philosophy is the situation, which became vacant about six weeks ago, by the death of Dr. Brown. The gift of the Chair is in the power of the Magistrates and Town-Council, and I have no doubt there will be a great struggle between the two political parties here. The *Whigs* hitherto have had everything their own way; and the late Professor was one, as well as the well-known Dugald Stewart, who resigned the situation from bad health, and who has it in his power to resume lecturing if he chooses, and which I fear he will do from party spirit, if he thinks there is any chance of Mr. Wilson's success. Mr. Wilson has been assured of all the support that Government can give him, and Sir Walter Scott has been particularly kind in his exertions for his success. The testimonials which he has received from the Professors at Glasgow as to his powers for such a situation, are most gratifying and flattering; indeed, his prospects are at present favourable; but I will not allow myself to be sanguine, though I must say that if Mr. Wilson was to get such an honourable situation, it would indeed be truly gratifying to me; and I think he is well calculated to fill, with respectability and credit, such a Chair. All the principal men here on the *Government* side are most anxious for his success; and even if he should be disappointed, the handsome manner in which they have come forward, may be as useful to him at some future time as it is satisfactory at the present.

The emolument of the situation in itself is nothing, but depends on the number of students who may attend the class. Dr. Brown had about a thousand a year from it. He was brother of the Miss Brown whom you may remember seeing here, and the authoress of *Lays of Affection.*

"If I have anything to say with regard to Mr. Wilson's affairs, I will let you know soon, but the matter will not be ultimately decided for some time; his *opponents* at present are *few*, and the most formidable is Sir William Hamilton, who is not a Government man, but others may start more appalling. Malthus is one talked of, and Sir James Mackintosh. The latter is an elderly man, who ranks very high in the literary world, and a *Whig.*"

This letter is dated 29th April 1820. She writes again in July: "I know that you take an interest in all our concerns, or I should not again bore you with the old story of the election, which, when I last wrote to you, I thought was concluded; indeed, the report that Dugald Stewart meant to resume his lectures, came from such good authority that Mr. Wilson set off immediately to Peebles to recover his fatigue. He was no sooner gone than he was sent for back again; for the very next day Dugald Stewart sent in his resignation, and the canvass began instantly in the most determined manner. You can form no idea with what warmth it is still going on, and the Whigs are perfectly mad. The matter is to be decided next Wednesday, and as yet Mr. Wilson has greatly the majority of votes, and I trust will continue to have them, and that

his friends will prove stanch. They have been uncommonly active indeed in his behalf, Sir Walter Scott in particular, who says there are greater exertions making by the Whigs now, than they ever made in any political contest in Scotland. The abuse lavished upon Mr. Wilson by them is most intemperate; his greatest crime is that he is a contributor to *Blackwood's Magazine*, that notoriously Tory journal. But I trust all will end well. I shall not write again till the 19th, when our suspense will be at an end."

Hostility on grounds purely political would have been, in the singular state of feeling which then prevailed, more or less excusable. But as the contest deepened, and my father's prospects of success grew stronger, the opposition took a form more malignant. When it was found useless to gainsay his mental qualifications for the office, or to excite odium on the ground of his literary offences, the attack was directed against his moral character; and it was broadly insinuated that this candidate for the Chair of Ethics was himself a man of more than doubtful morality; that he was, in fact, not merely a "reveller" and a "blasphemer," but a bad husband, a bad father, a person not fit to be trusted as a teacher of youth. These cruel charges touched him to the quick. It is difficult now to realize that they could have required refutation; but so far, it appears, did the strength of party-bitterness carry men in these angry days. My father found it necessary, therefore, to adduce "testimonials" to his moral character, as well as to his intellectual acquire-

ments. How painfully he felt these malicious attacks may be judged from the following letter to his friend the Rev. John Fleming, of Rayrig, Windermere: its manly spirit and noble tone under circumstances so trying to the temper, are worthy of remark:—

"53, QUEEN STREET, EDINBURGH,
*July* 2*d.*

"MY DEAR SIR,—I owe you many thanks for your most kind and friendly letter, which I laid before the electors, along with many others from persons of whose good opinion I have reason to be proud. The day of election is at last fixed, after many strange delays, all contrived by my opponents, who have struggled to obtain time, during which they contrived to calumniate me with a virulence never exceeded and seldom equalled. The election will take place upon Wednesday the 19th of July, and the contest lies between Sir William Hamilton, Bart., a barrister here, and myself; other four candidates being supposed to have little or no chance of success. I am, unfortunately, opposed by all the Whig influence in Scotland; but on the other hand, I have the most strenuous support of Government, as far as their influence can be legitimately exercised, and of many of the most distinguished independent men in Scotland. My friends are all sanguine; many of them confident; and I myself entertain strong, and I think well-grounded hopes of success. My enemies have attacked my private character at all points, and within these few days, have not scrupled to circulate reports that I am a bad husband and a bad father. I confess that this

has affected me greatly; as, whatever my faults or errors may have been, it is true as holy writ that I do tenderly love my wife and children, and would willingly lay down my life for their sakes. I need not say that such base insinuations have roused the indignation of my friends; but though calumny is in general ultimately defeated, it often gains its ends for the time being; and in this case it is likely to operate to my disadvantage with some of the electors whose minds are not yet made up. Now, you, my dear Sir, married me to one of the most sinless and inoffensive of human beings, whom not to love would indeed prove me to be a wretch without a soul, or a heart, or a mind, and to treat whom otherwise than kindly and tenderly would be an outrage against nature. God has blessed me with six innocent children, for whom I pray every night; and all my earthly happiness is in the bosom of my family. But to you I need say no more on such a subject. As an answer to all such calumnies, I fear not that my future life will be satisfactory; but, meanwhile, you will be doing me another friendly office by writing to me another letter, containing your sentiments of me as a man,—such a letter as you would wish to address to a friend who has ever loved and respected you, on understanding that he has been basely, falsely, and cruelly calumniated. The electors are satisfied with my talents, and even my enemies have ceased now to depreciate them; but the attack is now made on my moral character, and they are striving to injure me in the public estimation by charges which, at the same time, cannot, in spite of

their falsehood, fail to give me indescribable pain.—I am, my dear Sir, ever yours affectionately,

"JOHN WILSON."

Mr. Fleming's reply is not extant, but the answer to a similar request addressed to Mrs. Grant of Laggan may be given as a curiosity in literature, being, it is to be hoped, the last specimen that will be seen of such a testimonial to any candidate for a professorship. My father wrote to Mrs. Grant as follows:—

"*Sunday Afternoon.*

"MY DEAR MADAM,—During the course of the canvass in which I have for some time past been engaged, I am sorry to know that many calumnies have been industriously circulated against my private character. Among others, it has lately been insinuated that I am a bad husband, a bad father, and, in short, in all respects a bad family man. I believe that I may with perfect confidence assert, that whatever may be my faults or sins, want of affection for my wife and children, my mother, sisters, and brothers, is not of the number. My whole happiness in life is centred in my family, whom God in his infinite goodness has hitherto preserved to me in their beauty, their simplicity, and innocence. I am more at home than perhaps any other married man in Edinburgh; nor is there on earth a human being who feels more profoundly and gratefully the blessedness and sanctity of domestic life. This, my dear madam, must be your conviction; and you would now be conferring upon me a singular favour, by expressing to me in such a letter as I could show to my friends in

Council, of whom I have many, your sentiments with respect to me and my character. Your own pure and lofty character will be a warrant of the truth of what you write, and a hundred anonymous slanders will fall before the weight of your favourable opinion. I would not write to you thus, if I were conscious of having done anything which might forfeit your esteem; but whatever may be thought of my talents or of my poetical genius, neither of which I have ever wished to hear overrated, I have no doubt that I am entitled to the character of a virtuous man in the relations of private life.—I am, my dear madam, yours, with true respect, JOHN WILSON."

Mrs. Grant thus replied:—

"I have known your family for several years intimately; indeed, through intermediate friends, have known much of you from your very childhood; and in the glow of youth, high spirits, and unclouded prosperity, always understood you to be a person of amiable and generous feelings and upright intentions. Since you married, I have known more of you, and of the excellent person to whom you owe no common portion of connubial felicity; and I always believed her to be the tranquil and happy wife of a fond and faithful husband, domestic in his habits, devoted to his children, and peculiarly beloved by his brothers and sisters, and his respectable and venerated parent. Often have I heard your sisters talk with the warmest affection of you, and praise you, in particular, for your fond and unremitted attention to your wife; and, moreover, re-

mark how quiet and domestic the tenor of your life has been since you left their family, and what particular delight you took in that very fine family of children with which God has blessed you. If you were, indeed, capable of neglecting or undervaluing such a wife and such children, no censure could be too severe for such conduct. But in making an attack of that nature, your enemies have mistaken their point, as your domestic character may be called your strong ground, where you are certainly invulnerable as far as ever I could understand or hear. People's tastes and opinions may differ in regard to talents and acquirements, but as to domestic duties and kind affections, there can be but one opinion among those whose opinion is of any value."

A still higher authority came forward in vindication of his character. The following letter was addressed to the Lord Provost by Sir Walter Scott :—

"EDINBURGH, *8th July* 1820.

"MY LORD PROVOST,—Some unfavourable reports having been circulated with great industry respecting the character of John Wilson, Esq., at present candidate for the Chair of Moral Philosophy, now vacant in this University, I use the freedom to address your Lordship in a subject interesting to me, alike from personal regard to Mr. Wilson, and from the high importance which, in common with every friend to this city, I must necessarily attach to the present object of his ambition.

"Mr. Wilson has already produced to your Lordship such testimonials of his successful studies, and of his good morals, as have seldom been offered on a like

occasion. They comprehend a history of his life, public and private, from his early youth down to this day, and subscribed by men whose honour and good faith cannot be called into question; and who, besides, are too much unconnected with each other to make it possible they would or could unite their false testimonies, for the purpose of palming an unworthy candidate upon the electors to this important office. For my own part, whose evidence in behalf of Mr. Wilson is to be found among certificates granted by many persons more capable of estimating his worth and talents, I can only say that I should have conceived myself guilty of a very great crime, had I been capable of recommending to the Moral Philosophy Chair, a scoffer at religion or a libertine in morals. But Mr. Wilson has still further, and if possible, more strong evidence in favour of his character, since he may appeal to every line in those works which he has given to the public, and which are at once monuments of his genius, and records of his deep sense of devotion and high tone of morality. He must have, indeed, been a most accomplished hypocrite (and I have not heard that hypocrisy has ever been imputed to Mr. Wilson) who could plead with such force and enthusiasm the cause of virtue and religion, while he was privately turning the one into ridicule, and transgressing the dictates of the other. Permit me to say, my Lord, that with the power of appealing to the labours of his life on the one hand, and to the united testimony of so many friends of respectability on the other, Mr. Wilson seems well entitled to despise the petty scandal which, if not altogether invented, must at least have been

strongly exaggerated and distorted, either by those who felt themselves at liberty to violate the confidence of private society by first circulating such stories, or in their subsequent progress from tongue to tongue. Indeed, if the general tenor of a man's life and of his writings cannot be appealed to as sufficient contradiction of this species of anonymous slander, the character of the best and wisest man must stand at the mercy of every tale-bearer who chooses to work up a serious charge out of what may be incautiously said in the general license of a convivial meeting. I believe, my Lord, there are very few men, and those highly favoured both by temperament and circumstances, or else entirely sequestered from the world, who have not at some period of their life been surprised both into words and actions, for which in their cooler and wiser moments they have been both sorry and ashamed. The contagion of bad example, the removal of the ordinary restraints of society, must, while men continue fallible, be admitted as some apology for such acts of folly. But I trust, that in judging and weighing the character of a candidate, otherwise qualified to execute an important trust, the public will never be deprived of his services by imposing upon him the impossible task of showing that he has been, at all times and moments of his life, as wise, cautious, and temperate as he is in his general habits, and his ordinary walk through the world.

"I have only to add, that supposing it possible that malice might have some slight ground for some of the stories which have been circulated, I am positive, from

Mr. Wilson's own declaration, and that of those who best know him, that he is altogether incapable either of composing parodies upon Scripture, of being a member of any association for forwarding infidelity or profaneness, or affording countenance otherwise to the various attacks which have been made against Christianity. To my own certain knowledge he has, on the contrary, been in the habit of actively exerting his strong powers, and that very recently, in the energetic defence of those doctrines which he has been misrepresented as selecting for the subject of ridicule.

"I must apologize to your Lordship for intruding on your time such a long letter, which, after all, contains little but what must have occurred to every one of the honourable and worthy members of the elective body. If I am anxious for Mr. Wilson's success on the present occasion, it is because I am desirous to see his high talents and powers of elocution engaged in the important task of teaching that philosophy which is allied to and founded upon religion and virtue.—I have the honour, etc., WALTER SCOTT."

The day of success at last arrived; and Mrs. Wilson thus communicates the joyful news to her sister:—

"I am sure you will rejoice to hear that Mr. Wilson was yesterday elected Professor of Moral Philosophy, and that in spite of all the machinations of his enemies, the Whigs. He had twenty-one votes out of thirty,—a majority of twelve, which out of so small a number is pretty considerable. Poor 'Billy Balmer' took such an interest in the thing that he went yesterday morning

and stayed near the scene of action till it was all over, and then came puffing down with a face of delight to tell me that 'Master was ahead a good deal.'"

A few days later she writes in a strain of high triumph. Like a good and brave wife she regards her husband's enemies as hers, and under the summary designation of *Whigs* they come in for a proper share of her notice:—

"ANN STREET, *July* 27, 1820.

"MY DEAR MARY,—The want of a decent sheet of paper shall not deter me from immediately thanking you for your and James's kind congratulations on our success in the late canvass, which, thank Heaven, is at last at an end, after a most severe struggle, in which I flatter myself Mr. Wilson has conducted himself with a forbearance and a magnanimity worthy a saint, and which had he been a Catholic he would have been canonized for. The pertinacity of his enemies was unprecedented, and I suppose they have not done with him yet; but the Tories have been triumphant, and I care not a straw for the impotent attempts of the scum of the defeated Whigs. I must say I chuckle at the downfal of the Whigs, whose meanness and wickedness I could not give you any idea of were I to write a ream of paper in the cause. In the number of *Blackwood's Magazine* last published they got a rap on the knuckles, just as hints as to what they may expect in future if they persevere in their abuse.[1] . . . .

[1] Here follow sketches of some of Mr. Wilson's enemies and friends, alluded to in the Magazine, drawn in lively colours, from which we can only find room for that of "the Odontist:"—"The reputed author of the

"Mr. W. is very well, but as thin as a rat, and no wonder; for the last four months he has had no rest for the sole of his foot. He is now as busy as possible studying. His enemies have given him little time to prepare his lectures—one hundred and twenty in number. The class meets the beginning of November, and he has to lecture an hour every day till April. But for the detestable Whigs the thing might have been settled four months ago, and he would have had ample time for his preparations."

The proceedings at the election need not further be dwelt on. An attempt to rescind the vote at a subsequent meeting of Council was ignominiously defeated. The principal figure in that scene is a certain Deacon Paterson, who appears for once on the stage of history, armed with a "green bag," the contents of which were to annihilate the new Professor's reputation and quash the election. But the Deacon and his bag were very speedily disposed of, and forthwith disappeared into oblivion, in the midst of a hearty chorus of hisses.

My father lost no time in addressing himself to his important labours, and applied in all quarters, where help was to be relied on, for advice and assistance in collecting materials to guide him in the preparation of his lectures. Three days after the election he writes

'*Testimonium*' is a good-natured dentist, who lives in Glasgow, whose name is James Scott, and who is the only Scotchman I know, with a very few exceptions, that can understand or relish a joke, and all the *jeux-d'esprit* in *Blackwood's Magazine* he enjoys exceedingly, though, poor man, he could not write a line if his salvation depended upon it. . . . 'The Jurist,' who coined the rhymes in praise of *Blackwood*, is one of the great lawyers here, a Mr. Cranstoun."

to his friend, Mr. John Smith, the Glasgow publisher:—

"53, QUEEN STREET, *July* 22.

"MY DEAR SIR,—Many thanks for your very kind letter. The contest was, you know, of a most savage nature, but I never feared for the result. A protest was given in by the defeated party, but that means nothing, and I will be Professor to my dying day.

"It is quite impossible for me to visit you at Dunoon, however delightful it would be. My labours are not yet commenced, but they must be incessant and severe; and I do not intend to leave Edinburgh for one single day till after I have finished the course of Lectures. Nothing but perseverance and industry can bring me even respectably through my toils, and they shall not be wanting.

"What works do you know of on Natural Theology? Ask Wardlaw.

"In short, the next month is to be passed by in reading and thinking alone, and all information you can communicate about books and men will be acceptable."

On the 3d of August he again wrote to Mr. Smith:—

"MY DEAR SIR,—All is now fixed respecting my election, verbally as well as virtually. The *Minute of* Election is to be read, so says an old and obsolete law, *twice in Council*, and Deacon Paterson, as you probably know, gave notice on the 19th, that he would move to rescind the election. Accordingly, on the first reading of the minute (Wednesday following election), he rose and declared his intention of opening a bagful of charges against me, which, he said, would cause my

friends to rescind the election. This he tried to do yesterday, but my friends would not suffer his green bag to be opened. On this, he made a long prepared speech, full of all manner of calumnies against me, during which he was repeatedly called to order even by some of my opponents. At last, a vote of censure upon him was proposed and carried by twenty-one to six. On offering to apologize, this censure was withdrawn, and he did apologize. The vote was then put, 'rescind or adhere,' and carried 'adhere' by twenty-one to six, so that all is settled. The sole object, apparently, in all these proceedings has been to annoy me, my friends and supporters, and to give vent to the wrath of party feeling.

"I am anxious to know if you can get me Mylne's[1] notes. It is with no view, I need hardly say, of using anything of his, but merely of seeing his course of discussion.

"I am both able and willing to write my own lectures, every word; but before I begin to do so, I am anxious to have before me a vista of my labours, and this might be aided by a sight of his or any other lectures. But all this is confidential, for my enemies are numerous and ready, and will do all they can to injure me in all things. But they may bark and growl, for it will be to no purpose."

The successor of Dugald Stewart was certain to have all eyes upon him, and the circumstances of the election made him feel all the more imperiously the need of

[1] Professor of Moral Philosophy in Glasgow, under whom he had studied in 1801.

acquitting himself well in a place that had been filled by men so famous; above all merely personal considerations, too, he felt, with almost oppressive anxiety, the sacredness of the trust that had been committed to him as a teacher of that science which embraces all the higher truths and precepts which the light of reason can make known. He accordingly set about his preparations with his usual energy, and for the brief period that intervened before the opening of the session in November, appears to have worked incessantly. His portrait in his study is thus playfully sketched by my mother:—"Mr. Wilson is as busy studying as possible, indeed he has little time before him for his great task; he says it will take him one month at least to make out a catalogue of the books he has to read and consult. I am perfectly appalled when I go into the dining-room and see all the folios, quartos, and duodecimos with which it is literally filled, and the poor culprit himself sitting in the midst, with a beard as long and red as an adult carrot, for he has not shaved for a fortnight."

Of all the friends to whom he applied for counsel in this time of anxiety, there was none on whom he so implicitly relied, or who was so able to assist him, as Alexander Blair. To him he unbosomed himself in all the confidence of friendship, and in several long and elaborate letters—too long to be given entire—entered minutely into his plans for the course, asking for advice and suggestions with the eagerness and humility of a pupil to his master. He gives a list of the books he has got, and asks his friend to tell him what others he should have; what he thinks of this and that theory;

how many lectures there should be on this topic and on that. He sketches his own plan; how he is to commence with some attractive and eloquent introductory lectures "of a popular though philosophical kind," so as to make a good impression at first on his students, and also on the public. Here he purposes to give eight or ten lectures on the moral systems of ancient Greece, which Sir Walter Scott approves of; and which he hopes Blair will also approve of. "The subject is a fine one, and not difficult to write on. These lectures, it might be hoped, would give great pleasure."[1] Then will commence his own course in good earnest; six or more lectures on the physical nature of man; then twelve more, "though for no cause known," on the intellectual powers. On this he wishes to have Blair's opinion, for at present he sees nothing for it but to tread in the steps of Reid and Stewart; "which to avoid, would be of great importance." "Surely," he says, "we may contrive to write with more spirit and effect than either of them; with less formality, less caution; for Stewart seems terrified to place one foot before another." Then might come some lectures on taste and genius before coming to the moral being. "I believe something is always said of them; and perhaps, in six lectures, something eloquent and pleasing might be made out." Let Blair consider the subject. That brings us up to forty lectures. Then comes the moral nature, the affections, and conscience, or "whatever name that

[1] That anticipation was correct. No part of the course, I am informed, was more valued by his students. His lecture on Socrates, in particular, was considered one of his masterpieces in eloquence and pathos.

faculty may be called." Here seems fine ground for descriptions of the operations of the passions and affections, and all concerned with them. That requires twelve lectures at least; "indeed that is too few, though, perhaps, all that could be afforded." Then comes the Will and all its problems, requiring at least six lectures. "But here I am also in the dark." One more lecture, on man's spiritual nature, gives us fifty-eight in all. The rest of the course will embrace fifty lectures respecting the duties of the human being. "I would fain hope that something different from the common metaphysical lectures will produce itself out of this plan." He will read on, and "attend most religiously to the suggestions" of his friend. Let his friend meantime consider everything, and remember how short the time is; and that unless he does great things for him, and work with him, the Professor is lost. "I am never out of the house," he adds, "and may not be till winter." He is very unwell, and has just got out of bed; "but the belief that you will certainly be here at the time I fixed, and that you certainly will get me through, has enabled me to rise." So the letter ends that day with a "God bless you!" and the next begins with a recommendation to Blair to read Stewart's argument against the Edinburgh Reviewer's assertion, that the study of Mental Philosophy has produced nothing, and imparted no power. He thinks "that both Jeffrey and Stewart are wrong, probably, however, Stewart most so;" but Blair must examine it, "for it is a subject on which you could at once see the truth." Let him also see what Stewart

says on the origin of knowledge, "which seems worth reading;" "indeed," he adds, "these essays, though, I believe, not generally so highly thought of, seem to me to be the best of all Stewart's writings. But I am a miserable judge."[1] He then goes on with the sketch of the course. "Man's relations to God—Natural Theology, will require say eight lectures. Then his relations to man, and first the natural relations, say twelve lectures; then the relations of Adoption and Institution, not less than fifteen; this department to embrace discussions about Government, Punishments, and Poor-laws. This gives us thirty-three lectures, leaving seventeen for the discussion of Virtues and Vices, the different Schemes of moral approbation, and other important questions; little enough space." These make up in all one hundred and eight lectures, which he thinks will be about the number required. "I have got notes," he says, "of Stewart's lectures, but they are dull; they are but feeble shadows of his published works, on which he bestowed incredible pains." He inquires about Mylne's lectures. "I believe he followed the French, for he hated Reid. But though an acute man, I cannot think he had any wisdom; he was continually nibbling at the shoe-latchets of the mighty." He again recurs to Stewart's Essays, which Blair is to read and consider, "but only in the conviction that it

[1] This is one of many illustrations of the Professor's genuine humility. The egotism and self-complacency of Christopher North were as ideal as that personage himself. He appears in truth to have been, in metaphysics as in literature, a most acute critic; and some papers by him in *Blackwood* on Berkeley's Philosophy, were, I believe, referred to by Sir William Hamilton as admirable specimens of metaphysical discussion.

is necessary for us, which it seems to be. The truth is, that metaphysics must not be discarded entirely, for my enemies will give out that I discard them because I do not understand them. I want, on the contrary, in the midst of my popular views, and in general, to show frequently a metaphysical power, of which, perhaps, Stewart himself does not possess any very extraordinary share. In the first lecture on the Physical Being of Man this must be kept in view."

This letter is dated August 7th, so that it would appear that already, in the course of a fortnight, the Professor-elect had gone pretty deep into his subject, and even got the length of having a complete outline of his proposed course nearly matured. His good friend Blair was not found wanting in this crisis, and appears to have faithfully complied with his wishes, sending a regular series of letters, embodying, in the form of answers and suggestions, the results of his profound and varied study of philosophy, ancient and modern. Of these letters I have no specimen to give; but there is another of my father's sufficiently interesting to be quoted entire. He is at this time apparently (for it is without date) far advanced in his preparations, and has reached that part of his course where the inquiry passed from the region of morals into that of religion.

"MY DEAREST BLAIR,—I would fain hope that your useful and enabling letters do not interfere too much with your own pursuits, whatever these may be. The morning that brings me a legible sibylline leaf, is generally followed by a more quiet-minded day.

"I wish you to send me two or three letters, if possible, on that division of the passions regarding religion. It is imperfectly done, and altogether the whole subject of Natural Theology and our duties to the Deity is heavy. However, I have remedied that in some measure, and will do so still more this session. What I direct your attention to is the History of Idolatry. Some views of its dreadful, beautiful, reverent, voluptuous character and kind; and some fine things in the mythological system of the Greeks, in as far as feeling, passion, or imagination were concerned. Everything historical and applied to nations gives a lecture instant effect. Whatever be the true history of all idolatry (Bryant's or others), still the mind operated strongly, and there was not a passive transmission. The impersonalizing of imagination might be expatiated on here, for it was only alluded to in this respect in the Lectures on Imagination. I wish to see stated an opinion as to the power of religion in the ancient world, *i.e.*, in Egypt and Greece, among men in general. Something of the same kind, whatever it was, must have existed and still must exist in Christian countries among the ordinary people, especially in ignorant and bigoted forms of the faith. The image-worship of Catholics is, I presume, susceptible of the holiest emotions of an abstract piety; certainly of the tenderest of a human religion, and in grosser and narrower minds, of almost every thought that formed the faith of an ancient heathen. Many saints, intercessors, priests, etc., I mean no abuse of the Catholic faith, for I regard the doctrines of penitence and absolution and confession as *moral doc-*

*trines*, and I wish you would so consider them in an instructive letter. The burden of guilt is fatal, and relief from it may often restore a human soul to virtue. Confession to a friend, to one's own soul, to an elder brother, to a father, to a holy, old, white-haired man (in short, the best view of it), is surely a moral thing, and, as such, ought to be described. Our religious feelings, when justly accordant with the best faith, may be opposite, but true: the simple, austere worship of a Presbyterian, and the richer one of an Episcopalian, and the still more pompous sanctities of Popery. There are deep foundations, and wide ones too, in the soul, on which manifold religions may be all established in truth. We are now speaking not on the question of bestness, but as to fact. Surely the astronomer may worship God in the stars and the manifest temple of heaven, as well as a Scotch elder in a worm-eaten pew, in an ugly kirk of an oblong form, sixty by forty feet; yet the elder is a true man and pure. Sacraments in glorious cathedrals, or upon a little green hillside, which I myself have seen, but cannot describe, as you could do, who have never seen it;[1] and, above all, funerals; the English service so affecting and sublime, and the Scotch service, silent, wordless, bare, and desolate—dust to dust in the speechless, formless sorrow of a soul. In that endless emanation of feelings, how can reason presume to dictate any one paramount rule to be observed? No. But when by various causes in any nation one tendency runs the one way, then the heart of

[1] He had, however, if I am not mistaken, described such a scene with exquisite fidelity, in *Peter's Letters*, vol. iii. p. 75.

that nation runs in that channel; all its most holy aspirations join there, and there the sanctity of walls consecrated by the bishops of God, and the sanctity of walls consecrated by no set forms of words, but by the dedication of the place to regular and severe piety,—as in England, the one; in Scotland, the other.[1] In Scotland, people on week-days walk hatted into churches. Is that, to your mind, an allowable thing? I have seen it done by very religious old men, and not harsh or sullen. To take off their hats would, I think, be reckoned by many a wrong action. This, I conceive, is allowing the inferior motive to prevail over the superior. For they remember the idolatrous practices of the papists whom John Knox overthrew, and rather than resemble them in any degree, they violate the *religio loci*, which is, in the case, this over belief in God. This may seem a trifling concern to you, but it hurts me.

"In the above you will probably see what I want, and perhaps other points may occur to yourself. With respect to metaphysics, do not fear on any subject to write, provided *a conclusion is arrived at.* No letter of yours, *if filled,* can be otherwise than most useful to me. That metaphysical point to which you referred in one of your letters lately, namely, the pure and awful idea of sanctity and reverence to God, which is probably only an extension of a human feeling, is exactly fit for a letter. There is a book called the *Divine Analogy,* by a Bishop Brown, that I do not understand, on this subject. I think you have seen it; and Copleston, I

[1] This subject is beautifully treated by him in the first number of the "Dies Boreales."

think, touches on it. I intend to put such pieces of the lectures on the Duties to God, as are good, into this part, so that any metaphysical or otherwise important thoughts on our religious emotions or thoughts will be useful. All human emotion towards human beings is fluctuating, and made up of opposite ingredients, even towards our earthly father: towards God, unmingled and one, and this unmingledness and oneness is in truth a new emotion; it exists nowhere else. Men's conduct seldom shows this; but it is in the soul of many, most men. I once saw, in a dream, a most beautiful flower, in a wide bed of flowers, all of which were beautiful. But this one flower was especially before my soul for a while, as I advanced towards the place where they all were growing. Its character became more and more transcendent as I approached, and the one large flower of which it consisted was lifted up considerably above the rest. I then saw that it was Light, a prismatic globe, quite steady, and burning with a purity and sweetness, and almost an affectionate spirit of beauty, as if it were alive. I never thought of touching it, although still I thought it a flower that was growing; and I heard a kind of sound, faint and dim, as the echo of musical glasses, that seemed to proceed from the flower of light, and pervade the whole bank with low, spiritual music. On trying to remember its appearance and essential beauty more distinctly, I am unable even to reconceive to myself what it was, whether altogether different from the other flowers, or of some perfectly glorious representation of them all; not the queen of flowers, but the star of flowers, or flower-star. Now, as

I did not, I presume, see this shining, silent, prismatic, vegetable creature, I myself created it, and it was 'the same, but, ah! how different' of the imagination, mingling light with leaf, stones with roses, decaying with undecaying, heaven with earth, and eternity with time. Yet the product, nothing startling, or like a phenomenon that urged to inquiry, What is this? but beheld in perfect acquiescence in its existence as a thing intensely and delightfully beautiful; but in whose perception and emotion, of whose earthly and heavenly beauty, my beholding spirit was satisfied, oh! far more than satisfied, so purer than dew or light of this earth; yet as certainly and permanently existing as myself existed, or the common flowers, themselves most fair, that lay, a usual spring assemblage in a garden where human hands worked, and mortal beings walked, among the umbrage of perishable trees! Perhaps we see and feel thus in heaven, and even the Alexander Blair whom I loved well on earth, may be thus proportionally loved by me in another life.—Yours for ever, J. W."

Among other friends to whom he resorted for advice at this time, was his well-beloved teacher, Professor Jardine. The judicious "Hints" of the old man are given with characteristic method and kindliness, but scarcely call for publication here. So far as the order of the course was concerned, my father preferred to follow his own plan, as sketched in his first letter to Blair. To that plan, I believe, he adhered ever after, though, in important respects, he completely altered, in subsequent years, the substance of his lectures.

The opening of a new session is always an interesting occasion, and when it is the professor's first appearance the interest is of course intensified. The crowd that assembled to hear my father's introductory lecture proved too numerous for the dimensions of the room, and it was found necessary to adjourn to the more capacious class-room of Dr. Monro, the Professor of Anatomy. Wilson entered, accompanied by Principal Baird, Professors Home, Jameson, and Hope in their gowns, "a thing we believe quite unusual," remarked the *Scotsman*, in whose eyes this trifling mark of respect seemed a kind of insult to the audience, composed as it was to a large extent, of persons prepared to give the new Professor anything but a cordial greeting. An eye-witness[1] thus describes the scene:—"There was a furious bitterness of feeling against him among the classes of which probably most of his pupils would consist, and although I had no prospect of being among them, I went to his first lecture, prepared to join in a cabal, which I understood was formed to put him down. The lecture-room was crowded to the ceiling. Such a collection of hard-browed, scowling Scotsmen, muttering over their knobsticks, I never saw. The Professor entered with a bold step, amid profound silence. Every one expected some deprecatory or propitiatory introduction of himself, and his subject, upon which the mass was to decide against him, reason or no reason; but he began in a voice of thunder right into *the matter* of his lecture, kept up unflinchingly and unhesitatingly without a pause, a flow of rhetoric such

[1] The author of *The Two Cosmos*; MS. letter.

as Dugald Stewart or Thomas Brown, his predecessors, never delivered in the same place. Not a word, not a murmur escaped his captivated, I ought to say his conquered audience, and at the end they gave him a right-down unanimous burst of applause. Those who came to scoff remained to praise."

Another spectator of the scene tells me that towards the conclusion of the lecture, the commencement of which had been delayed by the circumstance already mentioned, the Professor was interrupted in the midst of an eloquent peroration by the sudden entrance of Dr. Monro's tall figure—enveloped as usual in his long white greatcoat—to announce that his hour had come. Pulling out his watch, the unsympathizing anatomist addressed him: "Sir, it's past one o'clock, and my students are at the door; you must conclude." The orator, thus rudely cut short, had some difficulty in preserving his self-possession, and, after a few sentences more, sat down.

The first lecture and those which followed, amply justified the expectations of friends, and completely silenced enemies. Even the unfriendly critic above referred to, while attempting to disparage this first display of his powers, patronizingly assured the new Professor that if he made the exertions he had promised, and demeaned himself as became the successor of Ferguson, Brown, and Stewart, his past errors might be forgotten, and he might obtain that public confidence which was essential to his success as a teacher. No such exhortations were needed to make Wilson feel the gravity of his position, and stimulate him to

maintain the glory of the University, on which for the next thirty-one years he reflected so much lustre. When he uttered the confident prediction, "I shall be professor to my dying day," it was in no boastful spirit. He had made up his mind to devote his full strength to the duties of the office, and with all his distrust of his own metaphysical capacity, he had a reasonable confidence in his ability to make the Moral Philosophy class-room, as it had been before him, a place of high and ennobling influence. To himself personally the change of position brought with it a consolidation of character and aims which imparted new dignity to his life and at the same time increased his happiness. In assuming the Professor's gown he did not indeed think it necessary, had that been possible, to divest himself of his proper characteristics, to be less fond of sport, less lively with his pen. His literary activity and influence increased in the years that followed this, for "Christopher North" was as yet but a dimly-figured personage. But from this time "The Professor" is his peculiar, his most prized title; the Chair is the place where he feels his highest work to be. I believe the prejudices and hostility which obstructed his way to it, however triumphantly overcome, threw their shadows forward more than is generally supposed. For, while no one could gainsay the fidelity with which he discharged his duty, and the altogether unrivalled eloquence of his lectures, I believe there were always some people who believed that he was nothing more than a splendid declaimer, and that his course of lectures contained more poetry than philosophy. He was himself

aware of this, and refers to it in a letter to De Quincey, in which he naïvely asks his friend to describe him as "thoroughly logical and argumentative," which, he says, "is true; not a rhetorician as fools aver." The truth is, his poetical and literary fame injured him in this respect as a lecturer; commonplace people thinking it impossible that a man could be both logical and eloquent, an acute metaphysician as well as a brilliant humorist. But among his own students generally there was but one opinion of "The Professor;" to them he was truly *Der Einzige*. Other professors enjoyed their respect and esteem; Wilson took their hearts as well as their imaginations by storm. They may have before this read and argued about philosophy; they were now made to feel it as a power. "The mental faculties" were no mere names; the passions, and affections, and the dread mysteries of conscience, ceased to be abstract matters of speculation, and were exhibited before them as living and solemn realities mirrored in their own kindling breasts; and when they found that that formidable personage, of whom they had heard so much, and whose aspect, as he stood before them (he never sat), did not belie his fame, was in private the most accessible, frank, and kindly of men, their admiration was turned into enthusiastic love. There are few who listened to him, whether in the palmy days of his prime, or in the evening of life, when he came to be spoken of as "the old man eloquent," that do not speak of him with glowing cheek and sparkling eye, as they recall the cherished recollections of his moving eloquence, his irresistible humour, his eager interest

in their studies and their welfare, his manly freedom of criticism, and his large-hearted generosity. The readiness with which he grasped at any question put to him gave his manner a quickness and animation of expression that at first was somewhat startling. While he had a terrible faculty for *snubbing* any display of conceit or forwardness, diffident talent was set at ease in his presence by the winning sympathy of his look and manner, which at once infused confidence and hope. But I am anticipating what will form the subject of a special chapter, and shall now close this with a brief letter, addressed to his friend Mr. Smith, on Christmas day 1820 :—

"My dear Sir,—If you can send me *instantly, i.e.*, by the return of mail or coach, Vince's 'Refutation of Atheism,' you will greatly oblige me. It is not in Edinburgh. Unless, however, you can send it immediately, it will be useless to me.

"I have no time to write. We have ten days of vacation, and I resume my lectures on January 2d. I have delivered thirty lectures, and am now advancing to the moral division of my course. As far as I can learn, my friends highly applaud, and my worst foes are dumb or sulky. The public, I believe, are satisfied. I need not say that my labour is intense. Direct to me at No. 53, Queen Street, where I send for my letters every day; and if you have time, tell me how you are, and what doing.—Yours very truly,

"John Wilson."

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